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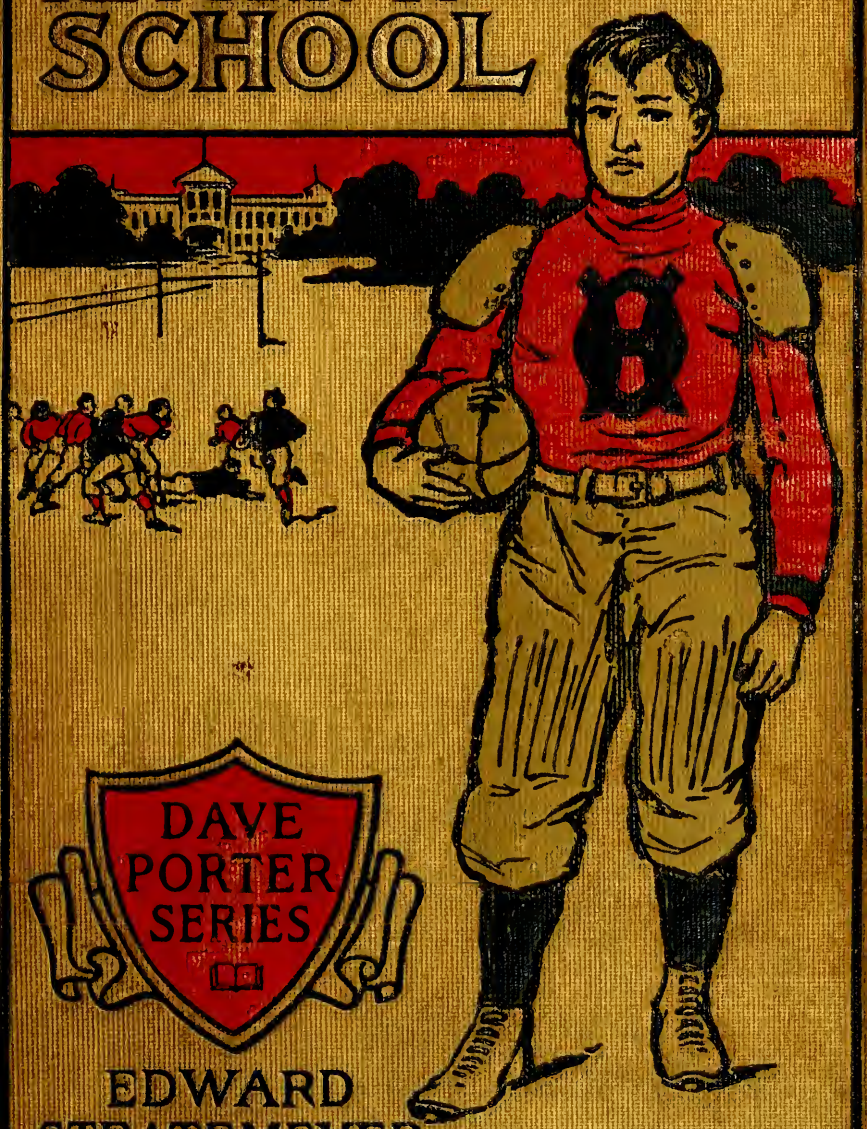

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Dave shook hands all around. — *Page 28.*

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Dave Porter Series

DAVE PORTER'S RETURN TO SCHOOL

OR

WINNING THE MEDAL OF HONOR

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," "Dave Porter in the South Seas," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series," "Colonial Series," "American Boys' Life of Theodore Roosevelt," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES NUTTALL

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DAVE PORTER'S RETURN TO SCHOOL

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PREFACE

"Dave Porter's Return to School" is a complete story in itself, but forms the third volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

In the initial volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," I took pleasure in introducing to my readers a typical American lad, of strong moral qualities, and told of many of the things which happened to him during a term at an American boarding school of to-day. Such a school is a little world in itself, and Dave made both friends and enemies, and aided one weak and misguided youth to a realization of his better self.

The great cloud over Dave's life was the question of his parentage. His enemies called him "a poorhouse nobody," which hurt him to the quick. At length he made a discovery which led him to begin a search for his missing relatives, and in the second volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter in the South Seas," we followed the lad on a most unusual voyage, in a quarter of our globe but little known. Here Dave met his uncle, and learned

something of himself and his father and sister, which pleased him immensely.

In the present volume the scene is shifted back to Oak Hall, where Dave goes to finish his preparation for college. His friends are still with him, and likewise his enemies, and what the various students do I leave for the pages that follow to relate. In all his trials Dave stands up for what is honest and true, and in this his example is well worth following.

Again I thank the many young people who have taken an interest in my efforts to amuse and instruct them. I hope this volume may prove to their liking and do them good.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

Washington's Birthday, 1907.

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DAVE PORTER'S RETURN TO SCHOOL

CHAPTER I

AT THE RAILROAD STATION

"HERE comes the train, fellows!"

"I hope Dave Porter is on board."

"He will be, and Ben Basswood too. Ben wrote to me that they were coming to-day."

"I wonder if Dave will be glad to get back to Oak Hall, Lazy?"

"Why not?" returned Sam Day, a big, round-faced youth, with a shock of curly hair hanging over his forehead. "Didn't we have fine times when he was here last term?"

"Yes, but——" Maurice Hamilton paused to glance at the train that had rolled into the Oakdale station. "There they are, sure enough! Hurrah!"

The train had come to a stop and a dozen or more passengers alighted. In the crowd were two boys, each carrying a dress-suit case. Both were

tall, well-built, and manly-looking. The one in the lead had a face full of merriment and earnest eyes that were rather out of the ordinary.

"Dave!" cried Maurice Hamilton, rushing up and catching the youth addressed by the hand. "You don't know how glad I am to see you!"

"Same here, Shadow," responded Dave Porter, and gave the other boy's hand a squeeze that made the lad wince.

"Whoa, Dave! I want to use that hand again!" cried Shadow, as he was familiarly called. "Not so hard."

"And how are you, Lazy?" went on Dave Porter, turning to the other boy on the platform. "Active as ever?" And he smiled brightly.

"No, it has been dead slow since you and Roger and Phil went away," answered Sam Day. "How are you, Ben?" he added, to the second youth from the train. "I hope you've come back to stir things up."

"Oh, Dave will stir 'em up, don't you worry," replied Ben Basswood. "He feels like a two-year-old colt since—well, you know," he added, in a lower voice.

"Any one would," responded Sam Day, heartily. "My, but what a trip you must have had to the South Seas!" he added, to Dave. "Wish I had been along!"

"Every one of our crowd has been wishing

that," said Shadow Hamilton. "When you're settled down, and have time, you must tell us all about it, Dave."

"I certainly will. Have you seen anything of Phil and Roger yet?"

"They are coming to-morrow."

"Good. All the others here?"

"All but Polly Vane and Luke Watson. Polly had to go to his aunt's wedding, and Luke had to go around by way of Albany, on business for his father. But the whole crowd will be on hand by the end of the week."

"And what of Gus Plum and Nat Poole and that crowd?" asked Ben Basswood, with a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"Oh, they are around, as lordly as ever. But say, wasn't Plum taken down when he heard that Dave had found some relatives and was rich! He wouldn't believe it at first; said it was a fake."

"But it is true," cried Ben Basswood, his face glowing. "Dave's folks are rich. I don't know but that Dave is the richest boy at Oak Hall now."

"Oh, come, let us talk about something else," said Dave, blushing in spite of himself. "Where's the carryall?"

"Here you are, gents!" cried a voice from the end of the platform, and Jackson Lemond, the driver from Oak Hall, appeared. He got down on one knee and made a profound bow to Dave.

"Hope I see you well, Lord Porter," he went on, humbly.

"Lord Porter?" queried Dave, in bewilderment.

"Hush!" whispered Sam Day, quickly. "Some of the fellows told Horsehair you were a real, live lord now, and he believes it."

"But I am not," cried Dave, and burst out laughing. "Up with you, Horsehair, or you'll get your knee dirty."

"Yes, sir, yes, sir," answered the driver, nervously. "Will—er—will Lord Porter sit on the front seat, or——"

"A lord always drives himself," answered Shadow Hamilton, with a grin. "Horsehair, you'll have to sit on the back spring."

"Yes, sir, but—er——" The driver of the carryall paused. "Any more boys?"

"Look here, fellows," interrupted Dave, throwing his dress-suit case on the top of the carryall. "I like fun as well as anybody, but making out I'm a lord is—well, it's something I don't like. Even though my folks may have a little money I want to be just as I used to be."

"Ain't you no lord?" gasped the carryall driver.

"Of course not—I'm a plain, everyday American boy."

"Well, I'll be switched! Them young gents told me as how you was a real lord, an' was coming

to the school with four colored servants, an' a whole lot more."

"And now Dave has spoiled it all," said Shadow Hamilton, with a ponderous sigh. "Puts me in mind of a story I once heard about a——"

"Yarn No. 1," interrupted Ben. "I thought you'd begin to tell 'em as soon as we arrived. You have 'em bottled up, and unless you pulled the cork now and then I suppose you'd explode."

"Which puts me in mind of another story, about a——"

"Wait till we are on our way to the Hall," cried Sam Day. "All in!" And one after another the schoolboys piled into the big carryall which was to take them to Oak Hall. The turnout was just about to start when there came a cry from the other end of the station, and two youths appeared, each loudly dressed, one somewhat after the manner of a dude and the other in the style of a sport. Each carried a small parcel, showing he had come down to the town to do some shopping.

"Gus Plum and Nat Poole!" whispered Ben, and his face fell. "I hope they don't want to ride with us."

"That is what they are going to do," answered Dave. "I am sorry myself, but it can't be helped."

"Jump in if you are going along," cried the Hall driver.

"Who have you got?" sang out Gus Plum,

rather roughly. He came closer with his companion and stared at those in the carryall. "Humph!"

"How do you do, Plum?" said Dave, politely. He knew Gus Plum to be the bully of the school, but he had determined to be perfectly fair to all.

"Humph!" murmured the bully again. "Got back, eh?"

"I have."

"Humph!"

"Going to cut a fearful swath, I presume," said Nat Poole, who was the bully's close crony.

Dave's face flushed. He had anticipated trouble, but had not expected it to come so soon. A sharp answer came to his lips, but he suppressed it and remained silent.

"Don't start in now, Plum!" cried Ben. "If you are going to the Hall say so and get in."

"I'll go to the Hall when I feel like it," growled the bully. It was plain to see that he was in an unusually bad humor.

"Well, we are not going to wait for you to make up your mind," said Shadow Hamilton. As we shall learn later, he had good reasons for counting Gus Plum his enemy. "Are you going, or are you not?"

"See here, Hamilton, you can't boss me!" roared the bully. "I'll get in when I please."

"The carryall has got to wait for us," added

Nat Poole, maliciously. "Dr. Clay said we could come back in it."

"Then come on," said Sam Day.

"We are not through with our errands yet," answered Gus Plum, and winked in secret at his crony.

"That's it—and the carryall has got to wait till we are through," added Nat Poole, quickly.

"How long?" asked Dave, looking sharply at Plum and Poole.

"Oh, about half an hour," answered the bully, carelessly.

"This is a shame," muttered Sam Day. "Horsehair, can't you come back for them?"

"Certainly," answered the driver.

"Then off we go!" cried Shadow Hamilton. "I'd rather ride without them anyway," he whispered.

"Hi! stop!" roared Gus Plum. "If you drive to the Hall you won't be back for an hour and a half or more. You've got to wait for us."

At this bold announcement there was silence all around. The students in the carryall looked at Dave, as he was their natural leader.

"There are four of us who want to get to the Hall without unnecessary delay," said Dave, steadily. "Either you can go along now, or wait till Horsehair comes back."

"That's the talk," came promptly from Dave's chums.

"So you are going to play the master, are you?" blustered Gus Plum. "Going to rule the roost, eh? and make everybody bow low to you, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind, Plum. I merely wish——"

"Oh, I know! You've talked soft to me before, and soft to Nat, too! I suppose you think now you have money you can do anything here. Well, it don't go—not with me anyway, and I want to give you fair warning right now, at the very start. I want you to understand——"

"Plum, don't talk so loud, you are drawing a crowd," whispered Ben. "Dave is all right, and you know it."

"Humph! I want him to understand——"

"Plum, listen to me," said Dave, leaning out of the carryall and facing the bully squarely. "I intended to have a talk with you later, but since you are so insistent we may as well have it out right now. When it was decided that I should come back to Oak Hall I made up my mind to do my best to keep out of trouble and stick closely to my lessons. I also made up my mind to steer clear of you, and Nat Poole, and all the others of your crowd, and I was going to ask you to leave me alone. I want absolutely nothing to do with any

of you, and I don't want any of you to go around talking behind my back, as you have been doing in the past. You know I could do some talking on my own account if I wanted to, but I prefer to keep silent. Now then, are you willing to meet me on those terms or not?"

"Humph!"

"That is no answer."

"You can't bully me."

"You are the bully and always have been, and you know it."

"That's the truth," said Sam Day.

"Plum, you've got to take a back seat, and the sooner you do it the better off you'll be," added Shadow.

"Exactly what I say," was Ben's comment.

"All against me, just as you always were!" cried Gus Plum, savagely. "But never mind! Just you wait, that's all!" And he shook his fist as he backed away.

"You're a set of sneaks!" murmured Nat Poole, as he too retreated. But he was careful to speak in such a low tone that nobody in the carryall understood him.

"I don't want to ride with you; I'd rather walk," went on the bully.

"I'll come back for you two," said the driver, as he took up the reins again. "Git up there!" he cried to his team and snapped his whip. "Looks

to me like there was trouble in the air," he continued, glancing first at the students left behind and then at those in the carryall.

"I am afraid you are right," answered Dave, soberly.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING OF THE PAST

ONCE again Dave Porter was brought face to face with the troubles which he had hoped had been put behind him forever. He had expected to have the best kind of a time on returning to Oak Hall, and here were his old enemies, Gus Plum and Nat Poole, ready to do all in their power to make his schooldays miserable.

To those who have read "Dave Porter at Oak Hall" Dave needs no special introduction. In that volume was related how the boy was found when a little child wandering along the railroad tracks just outside of the village of Crumville, and turned over to the poorhouse authorities. Every effort to establish his identity failed, and when he grew up he was taken in by a broken-down college professor, Caspar Potts, who had turned farmer.

The old professor did what he could for the youth, but his farm was mortgaged to a hard-hearted money lender, Aaron Poole, the father of Nat Poole, just introduced. Aaron Poole would have sold the old man out had not aid come from

an unexpected quarter. There was an automobile accident, and Dave succeeded in saving the life of a little girl, Jessie Wadsworth. For this the Wadsworth family were very grateful, and when it was learned that Caspar Potts was one of Mr. Oliver Wadsworth's former college professors, the rich manufacturer took the old professor to live with him, and also took care of the mortgage. Then, for his bravery, and because Dave reminded him of a dead son, Mr. Wadsworth resolved to send the youth to a boarding school and give him a thorough education.

Oak Hall was the institution selected, an ideal place of learning, located not a great distance from the town of Oakdale, in one of our New England States. The buildings were substantial and surrounded by beautiful grounds sloping down to the Leming River. Stately oaks grew on the grounds and in that vicinity, giving the school its name.

Dave had but one boy friend in Crumville, Ben Basswood, who also went to Oak Hall, but the lad was not slow to make other acquaintances, some of whom became his closest chums. Among the number were Roger Morr, the son of a United States senator; Phil Lawrence, whose father was a shipowner; Joseph Beggs, usually called Buster because he was so fat; and Sam Day and "Shadow" Hamilton, already introduced.

For a time all went well and the poorhouse boy

was happy. But then came trouble with Gus Plum the bully, and with Nat Poole, who also became a student at the Hall. Poole told everybody that Dave was a "poorhouse nobody," and Plum taunted him, with the result that there was a fight, in which Dave came off the victor. But this only angered the bully the more, and he vowed to "get square" sooner or later.

"I'll take it out of the poorhouse whelp," he said to Chip Macklin, a small youth who was his toady, and laid his plot with care. But the plan miscarried, and when Dave learned the truth he gave Chip Macklin such a talking to that the small boy resolved to have nothing more to do with the bully. Macklin turned over a new leaf, and was now hailed as "a pretty decent sort of chap" by those who had formerly despised him. Then Plum did something which got Shadow Hamilton into serious trouble, stealing a collection of valuable postage stamps belonging to the master of the school, which poor Shadow had hidden when he was sleepwalking. This base action was also brought to light, and the bully came near being expelled from the Hall.

The question of his parentage was ever in Dave's mind, and when he gained what he thought was a clew he followed it up as promptly as possible. An old sailor named Billy Dill declared that he knew Dave or somebody that looked exactly

like him, only older. This unknown individual was on an island in the South Seas, and the youth arranged to visit that portion of the globe in one of the ships belonging to Phil Lawrence's father. Phil, and Roger Morr, went with him, and also Billy Dill, the necessary funds for the trip being furnished by Oliver Wadsworth.

As related in the second volume of this series, "Dave Porter in the South Seas," the voyage of the *Stormy Petrel* proved to be a decidedly strange one. Fearful storms were encountered, and a portion of the crew, led by a dishonest supercargo and a mate, tried to run off with the vessel, leaving Dave, his chums, the captain, and some others, on an uninhabited island. But in the end the vessel was retaken, and Dave reached the place for which he was bound.

A great and happy surprise awaited the youth. He came face to face with a Mr. Dunston Porter, who proved to be the boy's uncle. Mr. Porter was rich and was wandering around the islands of the Pacific looking for a treasure said to have been buried by the natives years before. The uncle told Dave that he was the son of a twin brother, David Breslow Porter. Dave's mother was dead, but there was a sister Laura, one year younger than Dave. Mr. David Porter and his daughter Laura were now in Europe, traveling for the former's health. Dave had been stolen from his parents

by a crazy nurse, and because of this Mr. Porter never went anywhere without taking Laura with him. There was a good deal of money in the family, a fair share of which would rightfully fall to Dave when he became of age.

As was but natural, Dave was impatient to meet his father and his sister. He and the others journeyed back to the United States, and various messages were sent, to Mr. David Porter and to friends at Crumville. Then Dave and his uncle journeyed to the Wadsworth home, where they were warmly received.

At first the message forwarded to Dave's father in Europe brought no reply, but at last came back an answer from the keeper of a hotel in Paris where Mr. Porter and Laura had been stopping. This said that the Porters had departed some weeks before for an extended trip to Norway, after which they expected to sail for New York, to which place all mail was to be addressed. Where the two travelers were at the present time there was no telling.

"Dave, this is hard luck," said the boy's uncle, on receiving the news. "I don't know what to do except to wait."

"Can't we send letters to different cities in Norway?" returned the youth. "I want to meet my father and my sister so much!"

"Yes, we can try that," answered Dunston Por-

ter, and the letters were sent without delay; but so far no answers had been received.

Oak Hall had opened for the fall term, and after some discussion it was decided that Dave should return to that school until some word was received from his father. In the meanwhile Mr. Dunston Porter became the guest of Mr. Wadsworth.

Outside of the fact that he was impatient to meet his father and his sister face to face, Dave was very light-hearted when he and Ben Basswood left Crumville on their journey to Oakdale. Being a "poorhouse nobody" was now a thing of the past, and he felt relieved to think that no one could again taunt him regarding his parentage. More than this, he was now in the care of an uncle who was kind and loving to the last degree, and he was provided with all the money he needed, and it was "his own money," as he told himself with great satisfaction.

He had already met some of his chums since returning from the South Seas—boys who had stopped off at Crumville while on their railroad journey to Oakdale. All had congratulated him on his luck and wished him well.

But Nat Poole had not been happy over Dave's good fortune. They had met at the local post-office, and Poole had made some undertoned remarks that did not please Dave in the least. As a

matter of fact Nat Poole, even though fairly well-to-do himself, envied Dave because of his riches.

"Wait and see how he tries to lord it over us when he comes back," said Nat Poole to Gus Plum, when the two met at Oak Hall. "I suppose he will put on such airs there will be no living with him. And he will do what he can to buy all the other fellows over to him."

"He shan't lord it over me, or buy me over either," answered the bully. His tone was very bitter, because of the fact that his own position in life seemed to be going down. His father had lost money steadily during the past year, and it was now almost a question whether Gus should continue at school or leave and go to work.

"It made me sick to see how Crumville folks bowed and smiled to him," went on Nat Poole. "When he was nobody they wouldn't notice him—now they tumble over each other to shake him by the hand."

"But has he really got so much money?"

"They say so—but I don't believe it."

"Does he dress any better than he used to?"

"Hardly a bit better. If that uncle of his has the rocks I guess he is miserly about using any."

"Then maybe Dave won't have so very much spending money," said Gus Plum, his face brightening a bit.

"I don't know anything about that. But I do

know it makes me sick to think he is coming here to show off in front of all of us."

Gus Plum looked around cautiously. The pair were in their dormitory and nobody else was within hearing.

"Nat, we hung together last term and we had better hang together this term too," he whispered.

"What do you mean—against Porter and his crowd?"

"Yes."

"I'll do that quick enough."

"We must find some way to throw him off his high horse."

"Well, we don't want to get pinched doing it."

"We won't get pinched—if we do the thing right."

"I'm willing to do anything that can be done to make him eat humble pie."

"I owe him a whole lot—and so do you," continued the bully of Oak Hall, bitterly. "Don't you remember how he treated us at the athletic contests, and down at the boathouse? It makes me boil every time I think of it!"

"Yes, and the tricks he and his cronies played on us," returned Nat Poole. "Gus, I'll do anything—so long as we are not caught at it."

"I'd like to fix him so he'd be disgraced before the whole school." Gus Plum's voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

"Can we do it?"

"Maybe we can," was the answer.

And there and then, two days before Dave got back to Oak Hall, these two unworthies plotted to disgrace him and leave a smirch upon his fair name.

CHAPTER III

DAVE'S RETURN TO OAK HALL

THE carryall containing Dave and his friends soon left Oakdale behind and was bowling swiftly along over the smooth highway leading to Oak Hall. The boys were all inside, leaving the driver to manage his team in any way that suited him. Usually they loved to torment Horsehair, as they called him, but now they had other matters on their minds.

"The same old Plum," said Ben, with a sigh. "Doesn't it make one weary to listen to him?"

"Better try to forget him, and Nat Poole too," answered Dave.

"That is easier said than done," said Shadow Hamilton. "Which puts me in mind of a story. There was once——"

"He is bound to tell 'em," came, with a groan, from Sam Day.

"Never mind; go ahead, Shadow," said Dave. "Sam said you could start in after we were on board, and I'd rather hear a story than discuss Plum and Poole."

"You were talking about forgetting Plum. One day a boy got into his mother's pantry and stole some preserved plums. When the plums were found missing the boy's mother caught him and cuffed his ears in good style. Then the boy went outside and his chum told him to stop crying. 'Forget that your mother cuffed you,' said the other boy. 'I ain't thinkin' of that,' answered the boy who had stolen the plums. 'Then stop crying.' 'I can't.' 'Why not?' asks the other boy. 'Because the plums was hot an' I kin feel 'em all along my throat yit.'" And at this anecdote a smile passed around.

"I suppose football is being talked about," observed Ben, after a brief pause.

"Yes, some of the boys are playing already," answered Sam Day. "I have been waiting for Roger to get back. He was captain of our eleven last season, you'll remember."

"Yes, and you were right tackle."

"Do you suppose we'll get another challenge from the Rockville Military Academy?"

"Sure we will," burst out Shadow. "They'll want to wipe out the defeat of last year."

"Gus Plum has organized a football team of his own," observed Sam. "He has got Poole and a lot of new students in it. They call themselves the Arrows, and one boy told me they were going to have suits with arrows embroidered on them."

"By the way, what of Chip Macklin?" asked Dave.

"He is around and as bright as a button," answered Sam. "It is simply wonderful what a change there is in that chap since he cut away from Plum."

"Oh, look at the apples!" cried out Ben, as the carryall made a turn in the road. He pointed to a tree in a field loaded with the fruit. "Wish I had one."

"You won't get any there," declared Shadow. "That's Mike Marcy's field and he keeps any number of dogs."

"Well, I never!" burst out Sam, feeling down under the seat. "If you hadn't spoken I should have forgotten them entirely." He brought out a bag containing a dozen big red apples. "I bought them while we were waiting for the train. Here, boys, help yourselves." And he passed them around.

"Thank you, Sam," said Dave, as he bit into one of the apples. "This is fine." And the others said the same.

Each had his story to tell, and Sam and Shadow listened with eager interest while Dave told of his long trip across the Pacific, and his many adventures since he had left the academy.

"Sounds almost like a fairy tale," declared Sam. "I'd like to see something of the world myself."

The carryall made another turn and came in sight of the river, dotted here and there with small craft. Along the shore grew some bushes and a few trees.

"I see some of the fellows are out rowing," observed Dave. "I'd like to go out myself some day, before it gets too cold."

The carryall was passing a point where the road was considerably higher than the surface of the stream. Dave had bitten into a second apple, that proved to be wormy. Now he leaned out of the carryall and sent the fruit spinning down through the bushes toward the river.

"Hi! hi!" came back a voice from the shore below. "Who hit me?"

"Gracious, I must have hit somebody!" exclaimed Dave. "I didn't mean to do it."

"What's the matter?" demanded the driver, pulling his team in.

"You needn't stop," answered Ben. "Dave threw an apple away, that's all."

"I've got to fix the harness—there's a strap loose," went on Lemond, and leaped to the ground. He was at work when a man appeared, climbing up the river bank through the bushes. It was Job Haskers, one of the assistant teachers at the Hall, the only instructor the students did not like.

"Ha! so some of you played a trick on me, eh?"

fumed Job Haskers, as he emerged upon the road and strode toward the carryall. "Nice doings, I must say!"

"Did the apple hit you, Mr. Haskers?" asked Dave, mildly.

"Did it hit me? I should say it did, right on top of the head."

"I am sorry, sir."

"So you threw it, Porter. I am amazed that you would dare do such a thing."

"I didn't know you were down there—in fact, I didn't know anybody was there."

"A likely story," sneered the teacher, who was very often hot-headed and unreasonable.

"I am telling the truth, sir," and Dave's face flushed.

"I cannot go out for a quiet stroll by the river side but somebody must hit me in the head with a hard apple," growled the instructor. "Have you just arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ought to be more careful of what you are doing."

"As I said before, I didn't know anybody was down there."

"I presume you didn't want to see me." The teacher turned to all of the boys. "Where did you get those apples?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I bought them in Oakdale," answered Sam.

"Haven't been stopping at some orchard on the way?"

"You may ask Mr. Cassello, the fruit man, if you don't believe me," and Sam drew himself up.

"Well, be more careful after this, or you'll hear from me!" answered Job Haskers, and strode off down the road in a thoroughly bad humor.

"Phew! but we are catching it all along the line," was Ben's comment. "First Plum and Poole, and now Haskers. Wonder what we'll strike next?"

"I didn't mean to hit anybody," said Dave. "How peppery he is!"

"And he thinks we took the apples from some orchard," added Sam.

"Well, such things have happened," observed Ben, with a grin.

"Which puts me in mind of another story," said Shadow. "There was a little boy, and his mother had been away nearly all day. 'Mamma,' said he when she came home, 'can I have two apples?' 'Won't one do?' she asked. 'No, I want two,' 'Very well,' said his mother. Then she saw him go to the basket and get one apple. 'I thought you wanted two,' she remarked. 'Oh,' he answered, 'I had the other one this morning!' "

Sam burst out laughing and so did the others. "I see the drift of that," said Sam. "You haven't

forgotten when we went to Japlet's orchard after apples——"

"And the bull cornered Sam," said Ben. "Don't forget that, Sam."

"Nevertheless, Haskers is hard on us, and he had no business to call Dave down as he did, just for throwing the apple into the bushes."

"Perhaps he has found out something about that ram and how he got up in his room," whispered Ben, and then a laugh went up, in the midst of which the driver started up the carryall and the journey to Oak Hall was resumed.

Dave was on the watch, to catch his first sight of the school. They were passing through a bit of woodland. Now they made a turn, and rolled out in front of a broad campus lined on either side with a boxwood hedge. At each corner of the campus were clumps of monstrous oaks, the leaves of which had just begun to turn, and at the entrance were more of the same kind of trees.

The school itself was a thoroughly up-to-date structure, of brick and stone, laid out in the shape of a broad cross. The classrooms, the office, and the dining hall and kitchen were on the ground floor and the dormitories and private bedrooms and the bathrooms were above. Off to one side of the campus was the gymnasium, and down by the river were a boathouse and a row of bathing houses.

"Hurrah! Here we are at last!" cried Dave, and his heart gave a bound.

"Let us give 'em the old song, boys!" cried Sam Day, who was a good singer, and he at once started up the following, to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

"Oak Hall we never shall forget,
No matter where we roam;
It is the very best of schools,
To us it's just like home.
Then give three cheers, and let them ring
Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we
Elect to here abide!"

They sang with a will, and when they had finished they added the old academy cry:

"Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!"

"Hello! hello!" sang out a dozen voices from the campus. "Here come some more of the old students!"

"There's Dave Porter and Ben Basswood!"

"Hello, Dave, how do you feel after traveling across the Pacific?"

"Bring any of those South Sea Islanders with you?"

"Mighty glad to see you back, old man!"

So the cries rang on, as Dave and the others left the carryall. Dave was surrounded, and half a dozen tried to shake hands at once.

"We want you on the football team, Dave," said one.

"I'm glad to know you found your folks," added another.

"You've come back to stay now, haven't you?" asked a third.

Dave shook hands all around. As the school song had it, the place felt just like home. For the time being his heart was lighter than ever, and his return to Oak Hall filled him with more pleasure than words can express.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE DORMITORY

It took Dave several days to settle down and during that time he heard but little from Gus Plum and Nat Poole, who prudently kept their distance, awaiting the time when they might do Dave some injury.

During those days Roger Morr and Phil Lawrence arrived, both hale and hearty from their trip with Dave across the Pacific. The senator's son had spent two days in Washington with his father, while Phil had been settling up some affairs with his parent regarding the cargo of the *Stormy Petrel.*

"This is certainly like old times," remarked Roger, as the crowd sat in their dormitory. "I hope we have as much sport as we did last season."

"We will have, don't worry," answered Phil.

"Provided Job Haskers doesn't stop us," said Buster Beggs, who was lying across one of the beds. "Tell you what, boys, he is sharp on this

term. Yesterday he caught me writing on the boathouse wall and he made me write 'chirography' five hundred times."

"Well, that's a good way to improve your handwriting," answered Dave, with a smile. "I've done a little of that sort of thing myself."

"He kept me in two hours yesterday, when I wanted to play football," growled Shadow Hamilton. "It was a burning shame."

"But what did you do?" questioned Roger.

"Oh, nothing much. Nat Poole was coming down the aisle and he made a face at me. I happened to stretch out my leg and Poole tripped and went flat. Then old Haskers said it was all my fault."

"And what did Poole say?" asked Sam, with interest.

"Oh, he threatened to punch me good—but he didn't do it. He started to quarrel after school, but Gus Plum called him off."

"Well, that was queer," observed Dave. "Generally Gus is out for a fight."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow. "A little——"

"Narrative No. 206," broke in Sam.

"You shan't keep me from telling it," went on Shadow, calmly. "A little man——"

"How small?" asked Roger, with a wink at the others.

"Oh, that hasn't anything to do with it. A little man once met another man——"

"Was the other man small, too?" questioned Phil, seriously.

"Never mind if he was or not. A little man once met another man who had a big bulldog with him——"

"What was the color of the bulldog?" asked Dave.

"What color? See here, I——"

"When you tell a story, Shadow, give us the details, by all means. Was he white or black, red or yellow? Or maybe he was cream-color, or sky-pink, or——"

"He was—er—he was a regular bulldog color. Well, this man——"

"Sort of a brownish blue, with a dash of crimson and violet," suggested Phil.

"He was a regular common, everyday bulldog, only he was very big and very savage."

"Muzzled, of course," came from Roger. "Bulldogs always are."

"I saw one once that wasn't," added Buster Beggs.

"Some of 'em wear silver-plated muzzles," observed Sam.

"Do you mean to say this bulldog had a silver-plated muzzle?" demanded Dave, turning to Shadow.

"Who in creation said he had a muzzle?" cried the would-be story-teller. "I said——"

"I know you did, Shadow dear," said Luke Watson, who sat on a low stool with his banjo in his lap, tuning up. "Don't let them sidetrack you, or the bulldog either."

"What I want to know is this," said Phil, impressively. "Were those men white or black? That may have a very important bearing on the moral of the tale."

"See here, if you don't want to hear the story——" began Shadow, half angrily.

"We do! we do!" came from several at once.

"We are dying for you to finish," said Roger. "Now start up again. A small bulldog once came along, leading a big, fierce man——"

"That's not right," broke in Buster. "A small bulldog once met another bulldog leading a bulldog-colored man who——"

"Great Cæsar! That's as bad as the story of the canner," broke in Sam. "The canner can eat what he can and what he can't he can can, can't he?" And a laugh went up.

"I am going to tell this story if I die for it," cried Shadow. "A small man—remember that—met another man—remember that—with a big, fierce bulldog—remember that. The small man was afraid, but he didn't want to show it, so he said to the man with the bulldog: 'Is that dog a valuable

animal?' 'Yes,' says the other man. 'Well, don't let him loose, then.' 'Why not?' 'Because I don't like dogs and I might hurt him.' Now there's the story, and you've got to swallow it whether you want to or not."

"Which puts me in mind of a song," said Luke Watson. "Sam, you know it, and can join in," and he began, accompanying himself on the banjo:

"I love him, I love him,
He's down at the gate;
He's waiting to meet me
No matter how late.
He loves me so truly,
It fills me with joy
To hug him and kiss him—
My poodle dog, Floy!"

The song rang out clearly and sweetly, and when the verse was repeated the others joined in. But then came a knock at the door, and Jim Murphy, the big-hearted monitor, appeared.

"Hush! not so loud," he whispered, warningly. "Haskers is coming upstairs." And then the monitor disappeared again.

"I know what that means," said Luke, and rising he put his banjo away in a closet. "He stopped me before—he shan't have the chance to do it again."

The boys had scarcely settled themselves when Job Haskers appeared and gazed sharply around

the dormitory. He found all the boys either writing or studying.

"Who is making that noise up here?" he demanded.

To this there was no reply.

"If I hear any more of it I shall punish everybody in this room," added the assistant teacher, and went out again, closing the door sharply after him.

"He's in an elegant humor to-night," was Phil's comment. "Must have swallowed some tacks, or a cup of vinegar."

"He ought to be taken down a peg," said Shadow, who had not forgotten how he had been kept in. "I wish we could do something like last term when we got Farmer Cadmore's ram up in his room and——"

"That's it," cried Buster. "Only it won't do to try the same joke twice. We'll have to think up something new. Polly, give us an idea."

He turned to Bertram Vane, who sat at a table, trying to write a composition. Bertram was very girlish in appearance, hence the nickname.

"Please don't bother me now," pleaded Polly. "I want to finish this composition."

"We want some idea to work off on Haskers. Open up your knowledge box, Polly," came from Phil.

"Really I can't," returned the girlish student.

"I am writing a composition on Bats, and I want——"

"Baseball bats?" questioned Roger.

"No, no, living bats. Their habits are very interesting, and——"

"Polly has solved the question for us!" exclaimed Dave, and began to grin. "Just the thing! Polly, have you written much yet?"

"No, I hadn't the chance, with so much talking going on."

"Then you had better change your subject, for I don't think Mr. Haskers will want to read a composition on Bats to-morrow—not if the plan goes through."

"What is the plan?" came eagerly from several of the others.

"I just happened to remember that one of the boys over at Lapham's farm has a cage full of bats that he caught last week. He said he would sell them for fifty cents. Perhaps Mr. Haskers would be pleased to have them presented to him."

"Whoop! We'll get those bats!" shouted Phil.

"And put them in his room," added Shadow.

"And as we are modest we won't say where the gift came from," remarked Sam.

The plan was approved by everybody, even Polly Vane smiling faintly.

"Bats are very curious creatures," he observed.

"They fly in people's hair, and they can make one very uncomfortable."

The crowd talked the matter over, and it was decided to get the bats at once, if it could be done. As Dave knew the boy who had the creatures he was commissioned to go after them, taking Shadow and Roger along.

It was still early, so the three lads had no difficulty in getting out of the academy building. They did not, however, dare to ask for permission to leave the grounds, and so stole across the campus to the gymnasium building, back of which they vaulted the boxwood hedge. Close at hand was a road leading through a patch of woods to the Lapham farm, whither they were bound.

"We have got to watch out, when we are coming back," said the senator's son, as they trudged along. "We don't want to get caught by Haskers, or Dr. Clay either."

"When we return one of us can go ahead and see if the coast is clear," answered Dave. "It will be all right unless somebody has been playing the spy on us."

"I didn't see anybody."

"Neither did I, but I believe they are going to enforce the rules more strictly than ever this season."

It was a cool, clear night, with hundreds of stars twinkling in the sky. They knew the road well,

having traveled it many times before. They left the woods behind, and then came out on a small hill, below which was the farm for which they were bound.

"Perhaps the Laphams are in bed," said Shadow. "Some farmers go to bed mighty early."

"I know it, especially when the days are short," answered Dave. "Well, if the boy's asleep we'll have to wake him up. I guess he'll be glad enough to sell the bats. He said his mother didn't want him to have them around."

"I see a light in the house," said Roger, as they drew closer. "Have they a dog?"

"No."

"Then we can go right up to the door and knock."

The three students entered the lane leading up to the farmhouse. They saw a light flash up in one lower room and then appear in the next. While they were gazing it suddenly disappeared, leaving the farmhouse in total darkness.

"Evidently they are just going to bed," said Dave. "Hurry up, before they get upstairs."

He broke into a swift walk and the others did the same. They were close to the front porch of the house when they heard a shrill cry from within:

"John! John! Wake up! There is somebody in the house!"

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

"DID you hear that?" asked the senator's son, as he and his companions came to a halt on the porch of the farmhouse.

"I did, and there must be something wrong," answered Dave.

"Perhaps there are burglars around," said Shadow. "I must say, I don't like this," he continued, nervously.

"There was a burglary in Oakdale night before last," said Dave. "I heard Swingly the janitor telling about it."

All three now heard a commotion in the farmhouse. There was the slamming of a back door, and then somebody came leaping down the inside stairs.

"Where is he, Jane?" they heard in a man's voice.

"I don't know, but I heard the back door shut," answered a woman's voice. "And I saw a light."

"I don't see anybody," went on the man of the

house, and lit a match. Soon he had a lamp in his hand, with which he went to the back door.

"Did you leave the wash-shed window open?" he called out.

"No," returned Mrs. Lapham. "I shut it tight."

"It's open wide,—and the back door is unlocked," went on her husband.

"Any thieves around, pop?" came in a boyish voice.

"Better git the gun," advised another boy, Bob Lapham, who had the bats for sale.

The man went out in the yard, lamp in hand. As he did this, the three students walked around to meet him.

"Hello, what do you want?" demanded John Lapham, halting and staring at his unexpected visitors. "Were you in my house?" he continued, suspiciously.

"No, sir, we just came up," answered Dave. "We want to buy those bats your son has for sale."

"Did you see anybody around here—I mean going out just now?"

"No."

"We saw a light, in the parlor and the sitting room," said Roger. "It went out just as we came up."

"Then my wife must be right. Somebody has been in the house. I must take a look around."

The two Lapham boys now came out, and the whole crowd looked around the farmhouse and the stable near by. Not a soul was in sight anywhere.

"Whoever he was, he has gotten away," said the farmer, soberly. "I hope he didn't steal anything."

He and his sons were but partly dressed and they went in the house again, followed by the students, who were curious to learn if anything had been taken.

"I brought home a lot of stuff from my aunt's house yesterday," explained John Lapham. "She is breaking up housekeeping and gave us her silverware and such. I had it all in the box yonder."

He set down the lamp and threw aside the cover of the box he had pointed out. One look inside and he gave a groan.

"The silverware is gone!"

"All of it?" queried one of his sons.

"Yes, and the cut glass fruit dish is gone too!"

By this time Mrs. Lapham had dressed and now she came down. At the news she burst into tears.

"Oh, John, you must get after those burglars!"

"Can there have been more than one?" asked Dave.

"I think I heard two men moving around, but I am not sure," said the woman.

Another search was made by the students, while the farmer and his sons hastily donned the rest of

their clothing. Then John Lapham brought forth a shot-gun.

"I'm going to get that stuff back," said he, determinedly. "You say the burglars didn't go out by the front road?"

"We didn't see anybody," answered Roger.

"Then they must have taken to the lane that leads down to the river."

"Let us go down and see, pop," said Bob Lapham, eagerly.

So it was agreed, and after a few words Dave and his chums went along. For the time being the bats were forgotten.

"This may get us into a mess at the Hall," whispered Shadow, as they hurried along. "In telling the news Mr. Lapham will be sure to mention us."

"Well, that can't be helped, and we'll have to get out of it the best we can," answered Dave. "It's our duty to help capture those burglars, if it can be done."

The whole party walked down the lane leading to the river, which, at this point, overflowed a portion of the Lapham meadow. The farmer had brought along his barn lantern.

"I see something!" cried Dave, as a bright object caught his eye. But it was only a battered tin can, which caused everybody to utter a short laugh.

It did not take long to reach the water's edge. Here they saw where a rowboat had been hauled

up on the bank. In the mud and grass they made out the footsteps of two men, but that was all.

"Have you had a boat up here in the last few days?" asked Dave of the farmer.

"Ain't had a boat here in a month."

"Then this must have been the burglars' boat."

"I think so." John Lapham gave something of a sigh. "They got a good start."

"Yes, and we don't know which way they went," added one of his sons.

"Have you any idea what the stuff that was stolen was worth?" asked the senator's son.

"Fifty or sixty dollars, maybe more."

"I shouldn't think any professional burglars would bother to take such a small amount," was Shadow's comment. "Maybe they are worthless characters from around here."

"Like as not," answered the farmer. "Maybe the same rascals that robbed Jerry Logan's house at Oakdale. They got about fifty dollars' worth there too."

They looked out upon the river as best they could, but not a craft of any kind was in sight, nor could they hear any sound of rowing. The farmer drew a long sigh.

"I'm stumped," he declared.

"You'd better notify the authorities," suggested Roger.

"Won't do a bit o' good. The constable ain't

worth his salt, and the justice ain't no good either. If I want to find those burglars I've got to do it myself."

"Have you a boat?"

"No, but I can get one in the morning, and I'll get some of the neighbors to help me."

There seemed nothing more to do just then, and the whole party returned to the farmhouse. Then Dave explained what he had come for to Bob Lapham.

"All right, you can have the bats," said the farm boy. "They are in the barn. But what do you want of them?"

"Oh, we were going to use them for something —but perhaps we won't now," said Dave, and handed over the amount to be paid. Soon the bats were brought forth, in a battered mocking-bird cage. They were a round dozen in number.

"See here, Bob, don't say anything to anybody about our coming here," whispered Roger, slipping an extra quarter into the farm boy's hand. "We are not supposed to be away from the Hall, you know."

"All right, I won't say anything."

"And keep your brother and your father quiet too,—if you can."

"I'll do my best. I don't know your names anyway."

"None of them?"

"No."

"Good enough. Now we are off. Good-night."

The boys were about to turn from the farm-house when John Lapham called them back.

"What do you want?" asked Dave, and a sudden strange sensation took possession of him.

"I've been thinking that things look rather queer," went on the farmer, pointedly.

"In what way?" demanded Shadow.

"How was it that you didn't knock on the front door when you first came here?"

"We heard a noise and we listened to find out what it meant," answered the senator's son.

"It seems mighty queer to me," said the farmer, doggedly.

"What do you mean, Mr. Lapham?" demanded Dave, his face beginning to burn.

"It's queer you should come here this time of night just to get some bats that ain't any good to nobody."

"Well, that is what we came for and nothing else."

"You're sure you don't know anything about that robbery?"

"Mr. Lapham, do you take us for thieves?" cried the senator's son, hotly.

"I didn't say that; I said it was queer."

"You know we haven't the stolen stuff."

"And you are sure you don't know anything about those other chaps?" mused the farmer.

"Not a thing," answered Dave. "All we saw was the light just before it went out, and heard the noise."

"It is preposterous to think we would come here to take your silverware," went on Roger, warmly.

"Oh, pop, they are all right," said Bob Lapham. "All the students at Oak Hall are honest fellows."

"I don't know about that," was the grim answer. "They don't seem to be honest when it comes to getting in our orchards."

"I have never been in your orchard," said Dave.

"Nor I," added Shadow.

"Nor I," affirmed the senator's son.

"Last season I had about half of my fruit stolen."

"Well, some of it was taken by the boys from the military academy, you must remember," said Bob Lapham, who evidently wanted to help the Oak Hall students all he could.

"Yes, I know that."

"We are totally innocent," asserted Shadow. "I don't see how you can suspect us."

"What is your name?" demanded the farmer.

Shadow hesitated and then straightened up.

"I am not ashamed to tell you. It is Maurice Hamilton."

"And what is yours, young man?" went on John Lapham, turning to Dave.

"David Porter."

"And yours?"

"Roger Morr."

"Morr, eh? Do you belong around here?"

"No, sir, I come from near Hemson."

"Oh! Then you ain't related to Mr. Samuel Morr, of Bainridge?"

"I am. He is my uncle."

"Are you Senator Morr's son?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh!" The farmer's face changed slightly. "Well, that makes a difference. I know Mr. Samuel Morr quite well," he continued, but did not add that Roger's uncle held his note for two hundred dollars, and he wished the same renewed for three months. "Of course, if you are Senator Morr's son it is all right, and I am sure you didn't have anything to do with the robbery."

CHAPTER VI

JOB HASKERS'S BAD NIGHT

AFTER that the farmer questioned the boys further concerning their visit to his home and at last drew from the students their whole story. When they acknowledged that they wanted to play a joke on Job Haskers he smiled broadly.

"I know that man," he said. "He wanted to buy some apples and potatoes here once, to ship to some of his folks, and he was so close and mean about it, I wouldn't sell him anything. Go ahead and play your joke on him, and I won't say anything about it."

"And you won't say anything about our visit here?" questioned Roger, eagerly.

"Not a thing—unless, of course, it becomes absolutely necessary to do so."

"You're a brick, Mr. Lapham," cried Dave, much relieved. "We'll do all we can to help you catch those burglars."

"That we will," added Shadow.

"I am afraid we'll never catch them, boys. The

constable here is no good, and I don't know where to look for them," responded the farmer.

A few minutes later found the students on the return to Oak Hall, Dave carrying the cage full of bats.

"That was a narrow escape," was Shadow's comment, as they hurried along to make up for lost time. "I thought sure he'd report the matter to Dr. Clay."

"To think we should run into a burglary!" declared the senator's son.

"I wonder if the same fellows robbed Mr. Lapham who committed the robbery at Oakdale?"

"It is more than likely. I hope they catch the fellows."

It did not take the three youths long to reach the academy grounds. Roger slipped in ahead and was gone five minutes.

"Hurry up—the coast is clear!" he whispered, on coming back. "The side door is open and nobody on the stairs, so far as I could see."

They ran across the campus, Dave with the cage full of bats still in his hand They had almost reached the door when they heard it slam shut. Then the key was turned and the bolt shot into place.

"We're locked out!" whispered Shadow, in consternation.

"Let us try the other doors," suggested Dave.

They did this, making the entire round of the school building. Every door was shut and locked, even that to the kitchen addition being tight.

"Now we are in a pickle and no mistake," groaned the senator's son.

"I suppose the other fellows have gotten tired of waiting for us and gone to bed," said Shadow. "We've been away an hour and a half longer than we expected."

"One thing is certain, we must get into the Hall somehow," said Dave. "We can't stay out here all night."

"Let us go around under one of our windows," said Roger.

They were soon under a window of Dormitory No. 12. It was open from the top to admit the fresh air. All was dark in the school building and they had only the starlight to guide them.

Gathering up a handful of pebbles, Dave threw them at the window and Roger and Shadow followed suit. At first nobody paid attention to this. Then the window was raised from the bottom and the head of Phil appeared.

"Hello you!" he called softly. "Thought you were going to make a night of it."

"We were delayed," answered Dave. "All the doors are locked. Can't you open one for us?"

"I'll see."

Phil's head disappeared, and then Sam Day and Buster Beggs showed themselves.

"Got the bats?" asked Sam.

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"Here, in this cage."

"Good enough!"

The boys below waited fully five minutes after that. Then Phil appeared once more.

"It's pretty risky to open a door," he announced. "Mr. Dale is below, and so are Pop Swingly and one or two others. I think they are watching for somebody."

"I hope they are not watching for us," returned Shadow, with a shiver.

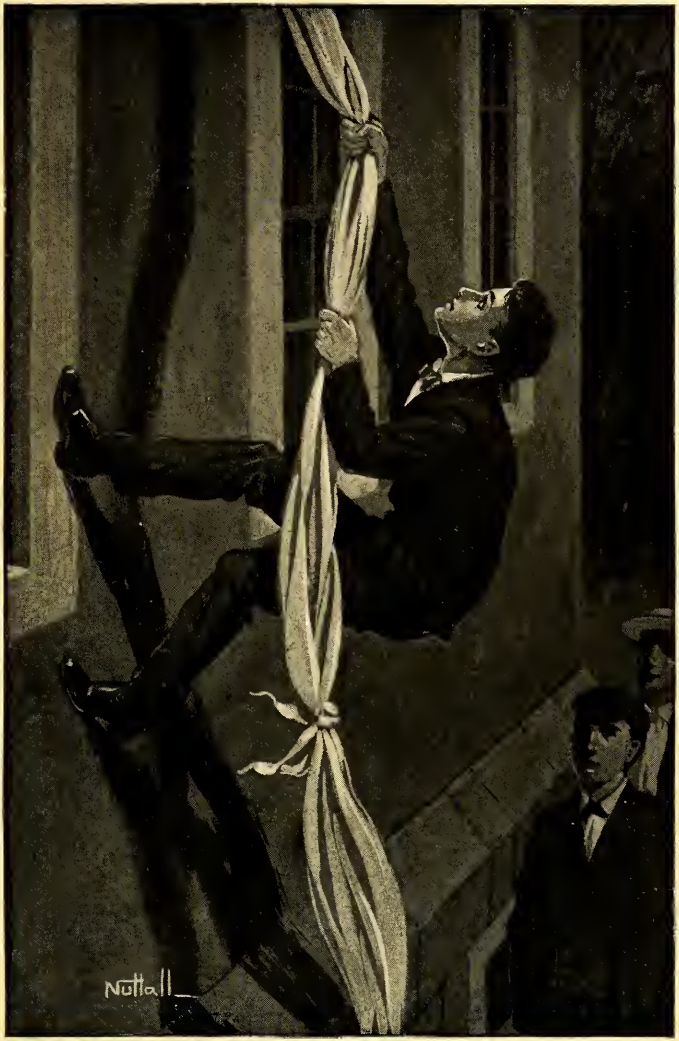
"No, I think they are looking for some other fellows who went out."

"Here's a fishing line," said Sam. "You can send up the bats on that, if you like. Then if you are caught, they won't find out what you were after."

"A good idea," answered Dave, and tied the cage to the end of the line. Soon the bats were hauled up to the dormitory and stowed away in a safe place.

"I wish we could go up on the line too," said Shadow, wistfully.

"We can get a ladder from the barn and go up, if you say so," suggested Roger. "Only, what will we do with the ladder afterwards?"



Dave began to mount the improvised rope. —*Page 51.*

"The ladder would expose us," said Dave. "I've got a plan. Take the bed sheets and make a rope of them, and we'll haul ourselves up somehow."

The charm of this idea took instantly, and those in the dormitory set to work to knot together five or six sheets without delay. Then one end was held fast while the other was dropped to the ground.

"Will it hold?" questioned Roger. "We don't want to break our necks."

"I'll try it," said Dave, and began to mount the improvised rope hand over hand, bracing his feet against the brick and stone building as he did so. As the youth was a pretty good athlete he had small trouble in gaining the top and hopping into the dormitory. Then Shadow came up, followed by the senator's son, and the bed sheets were hauled back and separated. The sheets were somewhat mussed from the strange usage, but that was all.

The other boys wanted to know what had kept Dave and his companions so long, but it was too late to relate the whole story.

"We can tell it in the morning," said the senator's son. "Just now let us see how the land lies for getting the bats into old Haskers's room."

He and Dave tiptoed their way out into the hallway, which was dark saving for a faint light near a bathroom door. Not a person was in sight, but

a faint murmur of voices came from a room below.

"I am afraid he will have his door locked," said Dave. "He learned his lesson when he had the trouble with the ram."

But to their satisfaction they found the door to the assistant teacher's bedroom unlocked. They listened and heard Job Haskers breathing heavily.

"He is sound asleep," whispered Roger.

"Let us put the key on the outside first," answered Dave.

This was done, and then the two boys went back for the cage of bats. The other students in the dormitory wanted to see the fun, and half a dozen went out into the hallway. In order that they might not be seen and recognized, the light was extinguished.

"I am going to loosen the bottom of the cage and then throw the whole thing on Haskers's bed," said Dave. "Stand ready, somebody, to lock the door."

"I'll do that," answered Phil.

With caution the door was opened for a little over a foot. Then Dave loosened the bottom of the cage and shook the bats up. As they fluttered around he threw cage and all directly on the teacher's bed. Then the door was quickly closed and locked and the key thrown down into the lower hallway.

For a moment there was silence. Then from Job Haskers's room there arose a frightful shriek.

"Help! Get away! What is this? Oh, my eye! Get away, I say! Oh! oh! Save me! I shall be killed! Get away!" And there followed a series of yells and thumps and the overturning of a chair and a table.

"He is enjoying himself—I don't think!" cried Roger, with a chuckle. "Oh, say, listen to that!"

"Back to the room, or we'll be discovered," warned Phil, and back they ran with all speed.

But the strange commotion had aroused the whole Hall, and dormitory doors were opened on all sides and students rushed out to see what was the matter. Then Dr. Clay appeared, garbed in a dressing gown. Andrew Dale, the first assistant teacher, ran up from below.

"What is the meaning of this unseemly noise?" thundered the good doctor. "Make a light, somebody."

Several lights were lit. In the meantime the noise in Job Haskers's room continued. The second assistant was having a hot fight with the bats. The creatures banged him in the face, whizzed past his ears, caught in his rather long hair, and practically scared him out of his wits. He made wild passes at them with his hands, dancing around in

the meanwhile, and in his bewilderment brought down a steel engraving covered with glass with a tremendous crash.

"Mr. Haskers must be going crazy!"

"Perhaps there is a burglar in his room!"

"Look out that you don't get shot!"

"I know what's the matter!" cried one fun-loving student. "He must have the hydrophobia. He said a dog tried to bite him a couple of days ago."

"Oh, if he has gone mad I don't want him to bite me!" shrieked one of the younger students.

"Better chain him up and pour water on him!"

"Mr. Haskers!" thundered the doctor, rattling the doorknob. "Mr. Haskers! What is the matter? Open the door."

But the noise was so fearful that no attention was paid to the request. Then came another crash, as the assistant teacher picked up a book, let it fly at the bats, and sent a big pane of glass in the window into a hundred pieces.

This was too much for Dr. Clay. Satisfied that something dreadful was going on, he put his shoulder to the door and burst it open. As he did this, something whizzed past his ear and made him dodge.

"Stop! Don't throw anything at me!" he called. "What in the world does this mean?"

"I don't know what it means!" roared Job Haskers, who was so bewildered he scarcely knew what he was saying. "Get out of here! Oh, my eye! That's the third time I've been hit!" And he made another sweep at his invisible enemy. Then, as Dr. Clay backed into the hallway, the teacher followed him and ran down the corridor like one gone crazy.

By this time somebody was bringing a lantern, and Andrew Dale had armed himself with a club. The doorway to Job Haskers's room had been left wide open and the sounds within had suddenly ceased. With caution Andrew Dale peered inside.

"I do not see anything out of the ordinary," he announced, looking around with caution.

"Maybe the bats have cleared out!" whispered Roger to Dave.

"I hope they have. See, the window is open from the top, and the bottom glass is broken out."

One after another, teachers and students crowded into the room. Phil spied the battered bird cage resting near the foot of the bed, and, in secret, passed it to Dave, who handed it to Sam. The latter was close to the window, and threw the object out as far as he could. In the meantime the excitement continued.

"I don't see anything."

"Better look for robbers!"

"Maybe somebody is in the closet."

The closet was searched, but nothing out of the ordinary was discovered. The students in the secret looked for bats, but every one of the creatures had taken its departure for parts unknown.

CHAPTER VII

A CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

"Mr. Haskers, I would like to have you explain this affair," said Dr. Clay, after the excitement had died down.

"Have you—have you got them?" faltered the assistant teacher, who was still much bewildered.

"Got what?"

"Why,—er—the—the things that were in my room."

"I can find nothing in your room, and neither can Mr. Dale."

"No—nothing? absolutely nothing, sir?"

"Not a thing out of the ordinary. Did you have a nightmare?" And the worthy master of the Hall looked sternly at his assistant.

"I—er—I don't think I did. I woke up suddenly, sir, and something flew by my head. Then something hit me in the face and got caught in my hair, and after that I—er—I was hit half a dozen times."

"Ahem! This is certainly extraordinary. You are sure you weren't dreaming?"

"I don't think I was, sir."

"Was your window open when you went to bed?"

"Yes, from the top."

"Perhaps a night bird flew in."

"There must have been half a dozen of them."

"Well, whatever it was, it is gone now. You had better go back to bed. You can push the chiffonier against the broken-out window if you wish, to keep out the cold air. Boys, I want you all to retire. We'll have the window and the broken lock mended in the morning."

The doctor turned and waved the students away, and one after another they departed for their dormitories. Then he followed Job Haskers into the latter's bedroom. The door was closed and what was said was not heard by the others.

"Well, that was certainly one on Job Haskers," chuckled Roger, as he followed Dave to bed.

"And I doubt if he ever learns what was the real trouble," answered Dave.

"By the way, I didn't see Gus Plum and Nat Poole," said Phil. "It is queer they didn't come out of their room."

"Maybe they weren't in the building!" cried Sam. "Mr. Dale was watching downstairs for somebody."

"I am not going to bother my head about it,"

announced the senator's son, as he began to get ready to jump into bed, having disrobed in part before playing the joke on the teacher. "The walk made me tired."

"I am tired, too, and sleepy," said Shadow.

"Ditto here," announced Dave.

All of the students had gone to their dormitories, and once more quiet settled over the Hall. The light that had been lit was extinguished, and one after another the boys hopped into bed and tucked the covers in around them.

"Great hambones! What's this!" came, an instant later, from Phil, and he began to wiggle from head to foot.

"Adam's tombstone, but this is fierce!" cried the senator's son and sat bolt upright.

"I should say it was!" declared Dave, as he also thrashed around. "I can't stand this. Who put something in my bed?"

"I didn't!" declared Buster.

"Nor I!" declared one after another of the occupants of the dormitory.

Once more the boys got up, and the light was again lit. It was soon discovered that a mass of burdock burs had been placed in the beds of Phil, Roger, and Dave. None of the other beds had been touched.

"This is an itchy joke and no mistake," said Dave, with a sickly grin.

"Puts me in mind of a story," began Shadow. "At a school——"

"No stories just now!" cried Dave. "I want to know who did this?"

"I saw some burdock burs yesterday," said Polly Vane. "Little Sammy Bilderman had them."

"Yes, and he gave them to Nat Poole," declared Chip Macklin. "I saw him do it."

"That explains it!" cried Dave.

"Explains what?" asked several of the others.

"Why Poole and Plum didn't show themselves while the racket was going on in Haskers's room. They came in here and fixed us up."

"It must be so," said Phil, "for I know my bed was all right before."

Dave leaped noiselessly to the door and threw it open. Nobody was outside, but he heard a door at a distance close softly.

"Somebody was out there. He just ran off," he declared.

"Come on," said Roger, and tiptoed his way into the semi-dark hall, followed by Dave and Phil. They made their way to the door of the dormitory in which Poole and Plum belonged. They heard a rustle and the faint creaking of two beds.

"We've found them all right," whispered the senator's son. "The question is, what shall we do in return?"

"Wait," advised Dave. "We've had enough for one night. Let us get to bed."

The others were willing, and so they returned to their own room. The burs were cleared away, and in a few minutes more all of the lads were in the land of dreams.

In the morning, on entering the classroom, the students found Job Haskers heavy-eyed and in anything but a pleasant humor. He called one class after another to order in a sharp, jerky voice, and gave the pupils demerit marks upon the slightest provocation. As a result Dave, Phil, and eight other students suffered in their general average.

"How I wish Dr. Clay would get rid of him," sighed Phil.

"And get another teacher like Mr. Dale to take his place," said Dave. All the boys loved Andrew Dale, who was as pleasant as he was capable.

It was not until two days later that Roger met Bob Lapham. The farm boy said his father had heard nothing more of the burglars and the stolen silverware, and had come to the conclusion that little could be done in the matter.

"It is too bad," said the senator's son. "I do hope he gets his stuff back some day."

Although Dave was out for fun and sport, it must not be thought that he neglected his studies. As my old readers know, he was a youth who put his whole heart and soul into whatever he was

doing, and this applied to his lessons as well as to everything else. In the past he had kept close to the top of his class, and he was resolved to retain that position or do still better.

"I came to learn something," he said, more than once. "I am not going to neglect my lessons, no matter what is in the air."

"But you'll join our football team, won't you?" asked the senator's son, who was looked upon as the leader in that sport by nearly all the old football players.

"I will if you want me to, Roger. But you know I am not an extra good player. Baseball is my game, not football."

"But we want you to play the position you took last year, when you made that victorious run."

"Very well. What of the other fellows?"

"Ben will be quarter-back as before, and Phil a half-back, and Sam right tackle. I haven't made up my mind about the others yet, although I think I'll try Shadow for center and Buster for guard."

"What do you think of the team Gus Plum has organized?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Dave, I think some of his fellows play pretty good football," answered Roger, in a low voice, so that no outsider might hear him.

"Just what I think. Henshaw is a dandy quarterback, and Babcock makes a good, heavy tackle.

We ought to have them on our team—if we are to play Rockville."

"Well, I would ask them to join us, only if I do that, Plum will say I am trying to steal his men from him."

The next morning came a surprise. Roger received a challenge from the Arrows to play a game of football the very next Saturday afternoon. Nat Poole delivered the paper, and his face had a superior smile on it as he did so.

"Why, Poole, we are not in trim to play yet," said Roger. "We need more practice."

"Afraid to play us, eh?" sneered the aristocratic youth. "I thought so."

"I am not afraid. Make it three weeks from now and I'll accept."

"No, you must play this week or not at all. If you won't play we'll challenge the Rockville fellows."

With this declaration Nat Poole hurried away, leaving the senator's son much worried. As Roger had said, his team needed practice. They were all good players individually, but team work is what counts in a modern game of football. He went to consult his friends.

"We can't do it," said Sam, shaking his head. "Why, some of us scarcely know the new rules yet, much less our signals."

"We need at least two weeks of good, snappy

practice," put in another of the players. "None of us are hard enough yet."

"This is a plan to get us into a hole," declared Dave. "If we back out Plum will challenge the Rockville boys and make out that his eleven is the representative one from this school. It's just like one of his dirty tricks."

The boys talked the matter over a good hour, and finally a vote was taken.

"I say play," declared Dave. "Let us practise all we possibly can. If we are beaten we can immediately send a challenge for another game on the Saturday following."

So it was at last decided, although Roger, Phil, and Sam were still doubtful. They declared it was taking a big risk and that if they lost they would never hear the end of it.

In the meantime Gus Plum was laughing in his sleeve, as the popular saying goes, feeling certain that Roger's eleven would not accept the challenge. Three of the players who had formerly played on the team of the senator's son had left Oak Hall, and that meant the substitution of green hands from whom it was not known what to expect.

"They'll crawl out of it," declared Nat Poole, as he and the bully of the Hall and a student named Jasniff talked it over. Jasniff was a newcomer at Oak Hall, a fellow with a squint in one eye and a manner that few of the boys cared to tolerate, al-

though, strange to say, it pleased Plum and Poole. Jasniff smoked, and played pool when he got the chance, and so did they, and, in addition, the new student was fond of drinking and horse races,—a poor sort of a companion for any youth who wanted to make a man of himself.

"You've got them dead to rights," said Nick Jasniff. "They'll crawl, see if they don't."

"I'll give them until Thursday to accept," said Gus Plum. "If they don't, I'll send a challenge to Rockville on Friday."

"Will Rockville play us?" asked Poole. "They may put up some sort of a kick."

"I'll let them know how matters stand," answered the bully of the Hall, with a suggestive wink. "If Morr's crowd won't play us, then we are the representative team of the Hall, aren't we?"

As the bully ceased speaking, Dave and Roger walked up to the three other boys.

"Here's our answer to that challenge, Plum," said the senator's son, and held out a paper.

"I presume you decline to play us," sneered the bully, as he took the note.

"On the contrary we take pleasure in accepting the challenge," said Dave.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVALS OF OAK HALL

FOR the moment after Dave made his announcement there was a dead silence. The faces of Gus Plum and his associates showed their disappointment.

"Going to play us, eh?" said the bully, slowly.

"You'll be beaten out of your boots," said Nat Poole, with a sneer.

"That remains to be seen," answered Roger. "We accept the challenge and we are here to arrange all the details of the game."

A talk lasting nearly a quarter of an hour followed, in which they went over such details as seemed necessary. Plainly Plum was ill at ease. He wanted to chose an umpire, referee, and linesmen from outside of Oak Hall, but the senator's son would not consent to this.

"I am satisfied to have Mr. Dale for umpire," he said. "And three of our head students can act as referee and linesmen." And so at last it was decided, but not without a great deal of grumbling.

"You won't win this time, Porter," remarked

Nick Jasniff, as Dave and Roger were leaving. "After this game you'll never be heard of again in this school."

" 'He laughs best who laughs last,' " quoted Dave, and walked away, arm in arm with Roger. Jasniff stared after him and so did Plum and Poole.

"They really mean to play after all," muttered Poole. "I was dead sure they'd decline."

"You never can tell what Porter will do," growled Gus Plum. "I'll wager he got Morr to accept."

"Well, we've got to wax 'em good and hard," remarked Nick Jasniff. "And we ought to be able to do that easily enough—with Henshaw and Babcock on our side. Those two fellows play as if they belonged to some college eleven."

"Yes, I hope great things from Henshaw and Babcock," answered the bully of Oak Hall.

When Roger and Dave returned to the members of their own eleven they were asked how Plum and his crowd had taken the acceptance of the challenge. Then the coming game was discussed from every possible point of view.

"Do you know, I'd almost rather beat Plum than some outside team," remarked Phil. "He deserves to be taken down."

"I don't like Nick Jasniff at all," said Dave,

slowly. "In one way I think he is a worse fellow than either Plum or Poole."

"He has a bad eye," said Sam. "It's an eye I don't trust."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," added Shadow. "Now don't stop me, for this is brand-new——"

"Warranted?" queried Dave.

"Yes, warranted. Two Irishmen and a Dutchman got into an argument and when they separated all three were in bad humor. The next day one of the Irishmen met the other Irishman. 'Sure, Pat,' says he. 'I don't loike that Dootchmon at all, at all.' 'Nayther do I,' answered the other Irishman. 'He has a bad eye, so he has,' went on the first Irishman. 'That's roight, he has—an' I gave him that same this very marnin'!' says the other Irishman."

"Three cheers for the new joke!" cried Roger, and a general laugh arose.

"Well, I suppose all we can do is to start practice and keep it up until the day for the match comes," said Dave, after the laughter had subsided.

"That's it," answered the senator's son. "We'll do what we can this very afternoon."

The boys went to their classroom with their heads full of the coming football contest. Roger had already made up his eleven, largely from the material of the season previous. But the boys

who had gone from Oak Hall left weak spots in the line which it was next to impossible to fill.

Then came another set-back, which made Dave and the others gloomy enough, and caused Gus Plum and his associates to smile grimly to themselves. Instead of remaining clear, a cold, dismal rain set in that very afternoon and kept up for two days. To practise on the football field was out of the question, and all Roger's eleven could do was to exercise in the gymnasium. Here there was always some one of Plum's crowd to look on and see whatever was being tried in the way of a trick or a new movement.

"I hope it rains Saturday, too," grumbled Phil. "We won't be able to make any kind of a showing at this rate."

"It will be just our luck to have good weather Saturday," sighed Shadow.

Even Dave was disheartened, but he did not show it. Instead he did all the practising he could in the gymnasium and helped Roger whip the eleven into shape. As he had said, he did not care for football as much as baseball, but he was resolved to do his best.

On Saturday morning all the boys were up early, to see what sort of weather they were going to have. The sun was under a cloud, but by nine o'clock it cleared up and a fine, warm wind from the south sprang up.

"That settles it, we have got to play," said Buster Beggs.

"Let us go out and practise as soon as we can," said the senator's son, and called the eleven without delay.

Of course the match had been talked over throughout the school and even outside. As a consequence, when the time came to play, a goodly crowd had assembled on the football field. There was cheering for both sides and the waving of a good many Oak Hall banners. In the small stand that had been put up sat Dr. Clay and about twenty visitors.

"I don't see anything of Henshaw and Babcock," said Dave, looking over the field. "They must be going to play."

"There they are, over in the corner, talking to Plum and Poole," answered Roger, pointing with his hand.

"They must be planning some new move," said Phil. "We'll have to watch out for them."

Presently Babcock, a fine, sturdy player, came forward, followed by Henshaw. Both were frowning, and when Babcock said something to his companion Henshaw nodded vigorously. Plum and Poole came behind, and neither appeared particularly happy.

The game was to be played under the rules of

that year, with two halves of thirty minutes each. When it came to the practice Roger's team did what it could. The players were full of energy, but the team work was not at all what it might have been.

"Want to tune up!" sang out one looker-on, to Roger. "Get together!"

"We are trying to," answered the senator's son.

Plum's eleven did much better in practice, working in perfect harmony. Only Poole made fumbles, for which the bully of the Hall upbraided him roundly.

"Oh, don't howl at me," growled Poole. "I am doing as well as you are."

At length the game was called and the two elevens lined up. They were pretty well matched, although Henshaw and Babcock stood out above the others.

"Wish that pair were on our side," sighed Roger. "Each of them has weight, wind, and cleverness—just the things a good football player ought to possess."

There was no time to say more. The toss-up gave Plum's eleven the ball and a few minutes later it was put into play and sent twenty yards into our friends' territory. Then came a scrimmage and the leather went back and forth rapidly. The play was ragged, for neither side had as yet settled down to hard work. There was no brilliant play,

and when the ball was carried over the line by Henshaw the applause was rather tame.

"An easy touchdown!"

"Now make it a goal."

This was not so easy, for the wind had freshened. The ball sailed outside of the posts, so that the Arrows received but five points.

Again the ball was put into play and now the work on both sides became more earnest. Several of Gus Plum's players became rough and Plum himself tried to "spike" Dave with his shoe. Dave gave the bully a shove that sent him headlong.

"A foul! Time!" was the cry.

"He tried to spike me!" cried Dave, hotly.

"I didn't!" roared the bully.

"He did—I saw it!" put in Roger.

"Have you spikes in your shoes?" demanded the umpire.

"No," muttered Gus Plum, but his face grew red.

The umpire made him show the bottoms of his shoes. Each had a small spike in it—something quite contrary to the rules, as all football players know.

"Change your shoes at once, or get out of the game," was the decision rendered, and Gus Plum ran off the field with a redder face than ever.

The first half of the game closed with the score

12 to 0 in favor of Gus Plum's eleven. A safety for Roger's team had been made by Dave, who saw it was the only thing to do when crowded by Babcock, Henshaw, and two others. The second touchdown made by the Arrows came through Babcock aided by several others.

"We could whip them if it wasn't for Babcock and Henshaw," said Luke Watson. "Those two chaps are dandy players and no mistake."

During the intermission it was seen that Gus Plum was having another lively interview with Babcock and Henshaw. But the two expert players would not listen to the bully of Oak Hall.

"Something is wrong in their camp, that's certain," was Phil's comment.

"Look here, if you say anything, I'll put you off the team!" cried Gus Plum, to Babcock and Henshaw, so loudly that many standing around could hear him.

"All right, put me off if you wish," answered Babcock sharply.

"I'll never play with you again anyway!" added Henshaw. "I've done my best to-day, but this ends it, if I never play again as long as I stay at Oak Hall."

"You're out of it, both of you!" roared Gus Plum, in a sudden rage. "Dawson, take Henshaw's place, and Potter, you take Babcock's place. I'll show you that I can run a team to suit myself."

"Very well," said Babcock, and turning on his heel he left the field. Henshaw, without saying a word, followed his friend.

All who witnessed the scene were curious to know what it meant, but none of the other Arrow players would explain. Soon it was time for the second half of the game. Two of Roger's players had been slightly hurt, and their places were filled by two substitutes, which weakened the eleven still more.

"Henshaw and Babcock are out of it!" cried Phil, to Roger and Dave.

"That gives us a better chance to win," said the senator's son.

"If it isn't too late," returned Sam Day; "12 to 0 is a pretty hard lead to overcome."

"We'll do our best," said Dave. "Let every man go in for all he is worth!"

The play was fast and furious from the very start, and inside of two minutes Roger's players had the leather close to the Arrows' goal line. But then Nick Jasniff with extreme roughness hurled Sam Day to the ground. Jasniff was offside at the time and his movements were consequently contrary to the rules.

"You may retire from the field," said the referee, after he and the umpire had talked the matter over.

Poor Sam was in bad shape when picked up and

carried from the field, but fortunately he recovered inside of an hour. In the meantime another player was put in his place and another in the place of Jasniff and the game went on.

CHAPTER IX

THE END OF THE GAME

"A TOUCHDOWN for the Morr team!"

"That's the way to do it!"

"Now make it a goal!"

The leather had been carried over the line after hard work. Without delay it was placed in position for the kick and went sailing directly between the two posts.

"That's the talk!"

"Now go and make another!"

There were still eighteen minutes in which to play. The goal made Roger, Dave, and the others enthusiastic, and they "sailed in" as never before. On the other hand, the loss of Babcock, Henshaw, and Jasniff cast a gloom over Gus Plum's eleven and the bully could do little to rally them.

"It was a mistake to fire Babcock and Henshaw," said one of the tackles. "They were our best players."

"That's right," added the center rush.

"Do you mean to say they can play better than I and Nat?" demanded Gus Plum.

"They can play just as well," grumbled the tackle.

"Rot! Come on ahead and wax 'em!"

But the call to "wax" Roger's team was of small avail. With Babcock and Henshaw gone the Arrows could do little or nothing, and soon Dave kicked a goal from the field. Then came another touchdown, another goal from the field, and two more touchdowns. Each of the touchdowns resulted in goal kicks. The Arrows were in despair and could do absolutely nothing.

"Pile it on!" cried Roger, enthusiastically. "Pile it on, boys!" And they did pile it on, until the whistle blew and the game was over.

Final score—Plum's eleven 12, Roger Morr's eleven 45!

It was a terrible defeat for the bully of Oak Hall and he could scarcely wait for the game to come to an end. He fairly ran for the gymnasium when it was over and did his best to keep out of sight for the rest of the day and all day Sunday, and Nat Poole went with him.

The cheering for Roger and his eleven was great, and all the players came in for their full share of glory. Dave had done some remarkably clever work, for which his friends shook his hand and congratulated him.

"Well, you gave Gus Plum's crowd all that was coming to them," said one of the students to Dave.

"I don't think he'll ever organize another football eleven in this academy."

What this student said was practically true. During the following week the Arrows held several stormy sessions and the upshot was that the eleven disbanded. Nearly all the players were angry because Gus Plum had put Henshaw and Babcock out of the game, for to this they attributed their defeat. It leaked out that Plum had wanted the two players to play some rough trick on Roger's eleven, and both Babcock and Henshaw had declined, stating that it was against the rules and unsportsmanlike. This had angered the bully, and hence the quarrel and separation.

"I want to play fairly and squarely or not at all," said Babcock, and Henshaw said practically the same thing. Gus Plum denied the report, but nobody believed him.

During the following week Dave was taking a walk along the river bank when he heard loud talking close at hand. Looking through the bushes he saw Sam Day and Nick Jasniff.

"You had no business to jump on me as you did at the game," Sam was saying. "It was outrageous."

"Oh, stop your yowling," grumbled Jasniff. "It wasn't done on purpose."

"It was done on purpose, Nick Jasniff, and I think you were a brute to do it."

Sam had scarcely uttered the latter words when Nick Jasniff, who carried a heavy stick in his hand, leaped forward and struck out. The stick landed on Sam's head and he went down in a heap.

"Don't!" he groaned. "Don't hit me again!"

"Won't I, though!" cried Nick Jasniff, in a passion. "I'd like to know what's to hinder me?" And he raised the stick again.

"Stop, Jasniff!" came from Dave, and leaping through the bushes he came up behind the student and caught the stick in his hand. "What do you mean by attacking Sam in this fashion?"

"Let go of that stick!" ejaculated Jasniff, and tried to pull it away. Then a tussle ensued which came to an end as Dave twisted the stick from the other youth's grasp and flung it into the river.

"What do you mean by throwing my cane away?" cried Jasniff.

"I want you to leave Sam alone."

"I've a good mind to give you a drubbing."

"Better not try it, Jasniff," answered Dave, as calmly as he could. He stood on guard against any treachery.

"Think you're the king of the school, don't you?"

"No, but I am always ready to stand up for a friend."

By this time Sam was staggering to his feet. He

rushed at Nick Jasniff and sent him backward into the bushes.

"You will hit me with your stick!" he exclaimed. "Thank you, Dave, for what you did, but I can take my own part." And he stood over Jasniff with clenched fists.

"Two to one, eh?" sneered Jasniff, as he got up slowly. "That's fighting fair, ain't it?"

"It is fairer than hitting a fellow with a stick," retorted Sam. "But I can fight you alone, if you want to fight."

"I'll not soil my hands on you further," grumbled Nick Jasniff, and backing away, he walked off towards the school at a rapid pace.

"The coward!" murmured Sam, as he and Dave watched the departure.

"Do you know, Sam, I don't like that fellow at all," said Dave. "I've said so before. He's a bad egg if ever there was one."

"I believe you. Cadfield told me that there was a report in the town Jasniff came from that he had once set fire to a farmer's barn because the farmer caught him stealing peaches, but the whole matter was hushed up."

"He doesn't appear to be any too good to set fire to a barn. We'll have to keep our eyes open for him after this."

"I certainly shall. I don't want to be struck down with a stick again," answered Sam.

With the brisk autumn winds blowing, kite-flying was in favor with many of the students of Oak Hall and numerous were the big and little kites that were sent up. Some were curiously painted, some were of the box variety, while others were in the shape of eagles and other big birds. Most of the kites were raised from a meadow near the river, and every afternoon a crowd of students would go down to watch the sport.

Roger made for himself an immense eagle kite, while Phil tried his hand at a plain affair, shaped like a diamond and eight feet high and five feet across.

"That ought to be strong enough to pull a wagon," was Dave's comment, as he surveyed Phil's creation. "You'll have to get a pretty strong cord to hold it, otherwise it may drag you into the river—if the wind happens to be blowing that way."

One afternoon a number of the boys brought out their flat kites and started to see who could make his fly the highest. Among the crowd was Nat Poole, who had a gorgeous affair painted yellow and red.

"Wait till you see this soar upward," he said, boastfully. "I'll bet it will go up a hundred feet higher than any other."

Half a dozen kites were already in the air and soon more were raised. Then Poole ran his new

kite up. It arose a distance of a hundred feet and then began to dart from side to side.

"You want more tail, Nat!" cried a friend.

"That kite isn't balanced right," said Ben.

"Oh, it's all right, only it isn't high enough," answered Nat Poole. He was not one to take advice, and so he did his best to get the kite to ascend without altering it.

Among those in the meadow at the time was Job Haskers. He was going on a visit to some ladies who lived not far from the Hall and was taking a short cut instead of journeying around by the regular road. He did not care for sports of any kind and so paid small attention to what was taking place. He was arrayed in his best, and on his head rested a new high hat, the silk nap polished to the best degree.

Dave was aiding Phil to manage his big kite and so did not notice the assistant teacher until Job Haskers passed close by.

"My! but he is dressed up!" Dave remarked to his chum.

"Must be going to see his best lady friend," was Phil's comment. "Oh, look at Nat Poole's kite!" he added, suddenly.

Dave looked and saw the kite in question far up in the sky and swooping wildly from side to side. Then the kite made a downward plunge, skimming over the meadow like a wild bird.

Down came Poole's kite on the teacher's head. — *Page 83.*

"Look out, or somebody will get hit!" cried Dave, and fell down as the kite passed within a foot of his head. Then the kite went up again, only to take another plunge.

As this was occurring, Job Haskers was starting to leap over a small brook that flowed across the meadow into the river. Another wild plunge, and down came Poole's kite on the teacher's head, smashing the silk hat flat and sending Job Haskers face first into the stream of muddy water!

The score of boys who witnessed the mishap could not help but laugh, and a roar went up. The teacher floundered around wildly and it was several seconds before he could pull himself from the brook. His face and the front of his clothing were covered with mud, and he was more angry than words can describe.

"You—you—— Who did that?" he spluttered, after ejecting some of the dirty water from his mouth. "I demand to know who did it!" And he shook his fist at the students.

"The kite did it," answered one boy, who stood behind some others.

"Whose kite was it?"

At this there was a silence, no one caring to tell upon Nat Poole, who stood with the kite string still in his hand and his mouth wide open in amazement and terror.

"I say, whose kite was it?" bawled the irate

teacher, and then, as he rubbed the water from his eyes, he caught sight of the kite and the string. "Ha! so it was yours, Master Poole!"

"I—er—I didn't mean to do it," stammered Nat Poole. "The—the kite came down all of a sudden."

"Infamous! Look at me! Look at my hat!" Job Haskers caught up the battered tile. "This is an outrage!"

"Really, I didn't mean to do it, Mr. Haskers," pleaded Poole. He was fairly shaking in his shoes. "The—the kite got the best of me!"

"A likely story! You boys are forever trying to play your tricks on me! I know you! You'll pay for this silk hat!"

"Yes, sir, I'll do that," answered Nat, eagerly.

"And you'll pay for having this suit of clothes cleaned."

"Yes, sir."

"And you'll pay all other damages, too."

"Yes, sir."

"And you'll go to your classroom and stay there until supper time," went on Job Haskers, in high anger. "Stay there every day this week, too. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"I will not listen to a word, young man. Go,—go at once! If I had my way I'd dismiss you from the school!" roared the assistant teacher.

And then and there he made Nat Poole take up his kite and march off to the academy, there to stay in after school every day for a full week. More than this, he brought in a bill for fifteen dollars' worth of damage, to the silk hat and the suit of clothing, and this bill Aaron Poole had to pay, even though the miserly money-lender did his best to evade it.

CHAPTER X

ALL ON ACCOUNT OF A KITE

"THAT'S the time Poole caught it," remarked Phil, after the excitement had come to an end.

"That's right," answered Dave. "I am glad it was not your kite, Phil."

"So am I."

"In one way, it was Nat's own fault," said Roger, who was near. "Half a dozen told him to balance the kite better, but he wouldn't listen."

Down on the river some of the students had attached their kites to boats and were having races. But soon the wind changed and the kites veered around to another point of the compass and the races had to be abandoned.

Phil's kite was well up and it was all he and Dave could do to manage it. Roger and Ben grew somewhat tired of the sport presently and brought down their kite and wound up the string. Then Phil and Dave began to lower the big kite.

"The wind is freshening," observed Dave. "Gracious! how this big kite does tug!"

He could scarcely hold it as Phil wound up the cord. Then came another blast of air and Dave

fell backward with the broken string in his hand, while the big kite went soaring away in the direction of Oakdale.

"There goes the kite!"

"Stop it! stop it!" yelled Phil, forgetting himself in his excitement.

"How?" asked Dave, dryly, as he arose from the grass.

"I don't want to lose that fine kite," went on Phil, soberly. "Why, it cost me over three dollars to make it. It was part silk!"

"Let us go after it," said Dave. "I don't think it will sail so very far."

Roger's kite was placed in the care of Buster Beggs and Shadow Hamilton, and off went the senator's son, Dave, and Phil after the runaway kite. The course was almost straight for Oakdale and presently they saw the silken affair settle in the direction of Mike Marcy's orchard.

"It is going down at Marcy's!" cried Roger.

"I hope it doesn't get torn in the trees," returned Phil, who was doubly proud of the kite because he had made it alone and by his own plan.

"Maybe Marcy won't give it to us," said Dave. "Remember, he doesn't like us students."

"Yes, and remember, too, that he keeps dogs," added Roger.

Mike Marcy was an Irish-American farmer who had lived in that section for many years. He was

what is termed a "close-fisted man," and one who had but little to do with the outside world. He was supposed to be rich, although he usually put on an air of poverty whenever anybody called upon him. His farm was of fair size, and contained a good stone house, a barn, and several other outbuildings. He had a big orchard, and to keep off thieves kept half a dozen dogs, all of them more or less savage creatures.

The three students approached the orchard from the rear and after looking around located the silken kite in the limbs of an apple tree. The tree was bare of fruit, but close at hand were other trees loaded with golden russets.

"Wonder if we can get that kite without being seen," mused Phil, as he gazed longingly at his property, dangling downward by its gorgeous tail of fancy ribbons.

"I don't see anybody around," answered Dave. "And I don't hear any of his dogs either."

"You want to go slow," cautioned the senator's son. "He may be around, watching us on the sly."

"Perhaps we had better go around to the road and ask for the kite," said Dave.

"No, he won't give it to us," answered Phil. "He is too mean—I know him. I'd rather try to get it on the sly."

The wind was still blowing and it was growing dark. They took another careful look around and

then leaped the fence of the orchard. Soon they were at the tree from which the kite dangled, and Phil climbed up.

"Catch it!" he called, as he loosened the tail, but just then the wind caught the kite and carried it to the other side of the orchard.

"There it goes!" cried Dave, and made a run after the object. The others followed, and presently they had the kite in their possession. In running through the orchard Dave caught his foot on a tree root and fell headlong but did not hurt himself.

With the kite in their possession the three students left the orchard as quickly as they had entered it. It was now so late that they were afraid they could not get back to Oak Hall in time for supper and so set off at a brisk pace. But suddenly Dave came to a stop.

"I declare, my watch is gone!" he cried.

"Your watch!" asked his chums, in concert.

"Yes, I must have dropped it when I stumbled in the orchard."

"Oh, Dave, that's too bad!" cried Roger.

"I'll have to go back for it," went on Dave. "It's the new watch my uncle gave me."

"Shall we go back with you?" asked Phil.

"No, there is no use of all three of us being late. You can tell Mr. Dale I lost my watch and stopped to hunt for it."

In another moment Dave had turned back and Phil and the senator's son continued on their way to Oak Hall. Dave started on a run, and it did not take him long to reach the orchard once more. Down under the trees it was very dark and he had to feel around for the watch. But he had dropped it just where he thought, and soon had it in his possession again.

"Now I had better hump myself and get back," he murmured, and started for the fence once more. Scarcely had he gone four steps when a form loomed up before him and he found himself in the strong clutch of Mike Marcy.

"Caught ye, have I?" said the farmer, in a cold, hard voice.

"How do you do, Mr. Marcy," replied Dave, as coolly as he could.

"How do ye do, is it?" roared the farmer. "I'll fix ye, ye villain!" And he started to shake Dave with great violence. He was a strong man and one given to sudden passion.

"Stop!" cried the youth, trying to squirm away. "Stop! What are you doing this for? I have done nothing wrong."

"Then stealin' apples ain't wrong, eh? And stonin' my dogs ain't wrong, eh? And stealin' a chicken, eh?"

"I am not stealing apples, and the only time I stoned one of your dogs was when he ran after me

as I was passing on the road. I didn't propose to be bitten."

"Don't tell me, ye young vagabond! I know you boys—a pretty crowd ye be, all o' ye! I'll have the law on ye!" And once again Mike Marcy shook poor Dave.

"What is it, Mike?" came from out of the gloom, and a woman appeared. She was the farmer's wife and as hard-hearted as her husband.

"I've got one o' them schoolboys," answered the man. "Caught him prowlin' around the orchard."

"See here, I have done no wrong, I tell you, and I want you to treat me decently," said Dave. "We came over awhile ago for a kite, that sailed into one of your trees. After we got the kite I discovered that I had lost my watch and I came back for it."

"A fine story indade," muttered Mike Marcy. "But it's not me that is going to believe that same. I've caught ye and I am going to make an example of ye!"

"Yes, Mike, don't let him go," put in Mrs. Marcy.

"You haven't any right to detain me," said Dave. "I have told you the exact truth."

"I don't believe it, and until ye can prove the tale ye'll stay here."

With this Mike Marcy took a firmer hold of

Dave's collar than ever and began to drag him through the orchard towards the farmhouse.

Dave struggled, but the strong farmer was too much for him and he was compelled to go along. The farmer's wife came behind the pair, armed with a mop she had picked up at the back door.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the youth, after a minute of silence.

"Ye'll soon see," answered the farmer.

They soon reached the barnyard attached to the farm. Here, to one side, was a smokehouse, built of stone, with a heavy door of wood and sheet-iron. The small building was open and empty.

"I'll put ye in there for a while and see how ye like it," said Mike Marcy, and shoved Dave towards the smokehouse.

"See here, Mr. Marcy, you are not treating me fairly. You have no right to make me a prisoner."

"Sure and I'll take the right. I have suffered enough and I'm going to teach somebody a lesson," answered the farmer, grimly.

"When Dr. Clay hears of this he'll make trouble for you."

"Will he? Not much, I'm after thinkin'. Ye had no right to be trespassin' on my land. The signs are up, and I take it ye can read."

"I simply came over to get something that belonged to me."

"Well, ye'll stay here for a while, an' that is

all there is to it," returned Mike Marcy, and without further ceremony he thrust Dave into the smokehouse. The youth began to struggle but could not get away, and once inside, the door was banged shut in his face. Then the bolt was secured with a stout iron pin, and he found himself a prisoner in pitch darkness.

"I'll be back sooner or later," cried Mike Marcy, in a satisfied tone. "So make yourself comfortable, me laddibuck!" And then he walked away, followed by his wife, and Dave was left to himself.

It was a galling position to be in and Dave resented it thoroughly. Yet what to do he did not know. He could not see a thing and on all sides of him were the thick stone walls of the building, the only break being the iron-covered door, which was practically as solid as the walls themselves. Under his feet the ground was as hard as stone. Everything was covered with a thick soot, so that he scarcely dared to put out a hand for fear of becoming like a negro.

"Here's a fine mess truly!" he murmured to himself, after several minutes had passed.

He listened, but not a sound broke the stillness. He wondered how it happened that Mike Marcy's dogs were not around, not knowing that the farmer had lost one through a peculiar sickness and had taken the others away to a dog doctor for special treatment.

A quarter of an hour passed. The time was unusually long to Dave, and now, at the risk of getting black, he began to feel around the smokehouse, looking for some means of escaping from his prison. From over his head dangled an iron chain, used for smoking purposes, and he climbed this, reaching a crossbar above. From the crossbar he could touch the roof, which proved to be of heavy planking, well joined together.

"If I could only knock off one of those planks I might get out," he reasoned, and began to feel of one plank after another, trying to determine which would offer the least resistance to his efforts.

Dave had just discovered a plank which seemed to be a little looser than the others when a sound outside broke upon his ears. Thinking that Mike Marcy was coming back, he dropped to the flooring of the smokehouse.

The sounds came closer and presently he heard two persons come to a halt close to the smokehouse door. By their voices they were evidently men, but neither was the owner of the place.

Wondering what this new arrival meant Dave remained quiet and listened intently. For several seconds he could not make out what was being said. Then he heard words which filled him with astonishment and alarm.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE WIDOW FAIRCHILD'S HOUSE

"ARE you dead certain the money is in the house?" were the first words that Dave heard distinctly. They came in rather a hoarse voice.

"Yes, I saw Mrs. Fairchild draw the money from the bank. She put it in a black bag and started straight for her home." The reply came in a voice that was also hoarse, almost guttural.

"It would certainly be a dandy haul."

"Just what I've said all along."

"But the risk. If that hired man sleeps in the house——"

"I don't think he does. The widow don't like men folks around. I heard that from one of the neighbors, the day I went to price some chickens."

"Well, we might go over to her place and take a look around," came after a pause, and then followed some conversation that Dave could not catch. A few minutes later the two men walked away, and the youth heard no more of them.

Dave was amazed and with good reason. If he

understood the situation at all the two men intended to rob the house of a widow who lived about half a mile up the road. They had seen her draw some money from a bank somewhere and intended to take the amount from her.

"They must be the very chaps who robbed Mr. Lapham and also the place in Oakdale," he thought. "I must get out and do what I can to outwit them!"

In feverish haste he climbed the chain again and pushed on the plank of the roof. By hard work he managed to loosen one end, but the other end seemed to be tight and refused to budge.

"If I only had something to pry it off with," he mused, but could find nothing. Then, almost in desperation, he dropped to the ground again and began to pound on the door, at the same time shouting at the top of his lungs.

For a good five minutes this brought forth no response, but presently Mike Marcy came forth from the farmhouse, lantern in hand, and stalked over to his barn. When he came out he carried a long rawhide whip in his hand.

"Say, boy, quit that noise, or I'll tan ye well!" he cried, wrathfully, as he came up to the smokehouse and set the lantern on the ground.

"Mr. Marcy, is that you?" queried Dave, quickly.

"Yes, 'tis, and I want ye to stop that racket."

"Let me out at once—it is very important," went on Dave.

"Important, is it?" sneered the Irish-American farmer. "'Tis more important ye stop that noise, so it is!"

"Mr. Marcy, listen to me," said Dave. "I have something very important to tell you. If you won't listen there will be big trouble. You must let me out, and both of us must catch two burglars."

"Sure, and what is the lad talkin' about?" exclaimed the farmer.

"I am telling you the truth. Let me out instantly."

"'Tis a trick, I'm after thinkin'——"

"No, sir, I give you my word of honor it is not. Let me out and I will explain. Please hurry up."

Dave's earnestness at last impressed the farmer to the extent that he opened the door cautiously for the space of a foot. As the youth came forth the man caught him by the arm.

"Now don't try to run, or 'twill be the worse for ye!"

"Mr. Marcy, listen!" cried Dave. "Only a short while ago two men were here. They stopped close to the smokehouse to talk. They spoke of the Widow Fairchild having money in her house which she had just gotten from the bank. They

talked of robbing her, and they went off to do the job."

The farmer listened and his jaw dropped slightly.

"Is it a fairy story ye are after tellin'?"

"No, sir, it is the absolute truth. I think they were the same chaps who robbed Mr. Lapham and robbed that house in Oakdale. They seem to be doing their best to loot this whole neighborhood."

"They were here?" faltered Mike Marcy. At last he began to believe Dave.

"Yes, sir, not over quarter of an hour ago."

"Did they speak of robbing my place?" went on the Irish-American farmer suspiciously.

"No, sir, I am sure they started directly for Mrs. Fairchild's place."

"And ye want me to go with ye and catch them?"

"Isn't it our duty to catch them if we can?"

"Sure. But can we do it alone?"

"We can call up somebody else on the way."

"So we can. Well, I'll go—but first I'll take a look around my own place," added Mike Marcy.

He took his lantern and walked around the house and then told his wife of Dave's discovery. Mrs. Marcy began to tremble as she listened, and she shook her head when her husband said he proposed to go after the robbers.

"It is not meself is going to stay here all alone, wid robbers floatin' around in the dark," said Mrs. Marcy. "Let the boy call up the constable, or somebody else."

"It will take too long," said Dave, impatiently. "Even now it may be too late."

"Ye'll be safe enough with the doors and windows locked," said Mike Marcy. "Ye can use the shotgun if they come back. I'll take the pistol."

He was a man used to having his own way, and soon he set off with his pistol in his pocket and a good-sized club in his hand. Dave armed himself with another club, and set a good stiff pace, once they were on the road.

"We can stop at Brown's house and call him up," said Mike Marcy. He referred to Farmer Brown, who occupied a house directly on the road they were traveling. Reaching the place they knocked loudly on the door and presently the owner stuck his head out of an upper window.

"What's wanted?"

"Come down here," shouted Mike Marcy. "We want ye to help capture two robbers."

"Two robbers?" said Farmer Brown.

"Mercy sakes alive!" burst out the farmer's wife. "Are robbers around? We'll all be murdered in our beds!"

"They ain't here—they be over to the Widow

Fairchild's," answered Mike Marcy. "Come on. Is Bill around?"

"Yes, here I am," said the farmer's son, from another window. "I'll be down in a minit, with my gun."

There was a short argument after this, but in the end Farmer Brown and his son Bill, a tall, wiry youth of nineteen, agreed to accompany Mike Marcy and Dave. Mrs. Fairchild's home was less than a quarter of a mile away, and to cut off a bend of the highway they took to an open field which came to an end at the edge of the widow's orchard.

"There is the house," whispered Mike Marcy, at last. "Better go slow now."

"Yes, we don't want them to get away," answered Dave.

"Let us spread out around the house," advised Farmer Brown. "The first one to spot the rascals can give the alarm."

So it was agreed, and while Dave went to the rear of the dwelling the others passed to the front and sides. The place was pitch dark on the inside and lit up only by the light of the stars from without.

Dave's heart was beating rather rapidly, for there was no telling when he would find himself face to face with the two robbers, and he realized that they must be desperate characters. He

clutched the club tightly, resolved to do his best, should it come to a hand-to-hand encounter.

Several minutes passed and slowly the four outside walked completely around the building. Only one window was open, that to the dining room.

"See anybody?" whispered Mike Marcy, coming up to Dave.

"No."

"Sure ye didn't make any mistake?"

"I didn't see a soul. Maybe they haven't come up yet."

"That is so."

"We can wait a while and see," suggested Bill Brown. "If we wake the widder we may scare 'em off."

They waited after that for another spell, but nobody appeared, nor did they hear any sound out of the ordinary. Then it was resolved to arouse Mrs. Fairchild and wait in the house for the coming of the robbers.

"That is, if they are coming," said Farmer Brown. "Maybe the boy made a mistake."

"I am certain I made no mistake," answered Dave, positively. "But they may have changed their plans."

"Humph!" muttered Mike Marcy. "If it's a trick—But we'll talk that over later."

The door had an old-fashioned knocker, and this Farmer Brown used lightly at first and then with

vigor. To the surprise of all in the party nobody answered the summons.

"The widder must be away!" cried Farmer Brown. "Funny,—she was home at sundown. Where would she go after dark?"

"Perhaps she's been murdered," suggested Bill.

"Murdered!" exclaimed the others, and Dave's blood seemed to run cold.

"A regular robber wouldn't stop at murder, if he was caught in the act," said the farmer.

"Maybe we ought to break in the door."

"Or git in through the window," suggested Mike Marcy.

While they were deliberating they heard the sounds of carriage wheels on the road. The turnout was coming along at smart speed and all ran towards the road to see who was driving. To their surprise they saw the Widow Fairchild alight, followed by a farmer named Burr and a hired man called Sandy.

"How do ye do, widder!" called out Farmer Brown. "Been away long?"

"Why, what does this mean?" stammered Mrs. Fairchild, who was a woman of forty and weighed at least two hundred pounds. She often went out to do nursing throughout the Oakdale district.

"We came here lookin' fer robbers," explained Mike Marcy. "We thought they was comin' to visit you."

"By gum!" came from the farmer named Burr. "Reckon you are right, Mrs. Fairchild."

"Right? How?" asked Dave, quickly.

"I'll tell you," answered the widow. "About an hour ago somebody knocked on the door. I opened the window upstairs and asked what was wanted. A man was there muffled up in an overcoat. Says he, 'Is that you, Mrs. Fairchild?' 'Yes,' says I. 'Well,' says he, 'you're wanted over to Mrs. Burr's house right away. The baby is dying. I've got to go for a doctor,' says he, and runs away. I didn't hardly know what to do, but I hurried into my clothes and locked up and almost run to Mr. Burr's place. When I got there they was all to bed and the baby as healthy as ever. Then I got suspicious, for I've got four hundred dollars in the house that I got out of the bank at Rayfield to pay off on that new house I'm building in Oakdale. Mr. Burr hitched up at once and brought me over. So you know about the fellow, do you?"

"I know two men started for this place to rob your house," said Dave.

"Better go in and see if the money is safe," suggested Farmer Brown. "Did you leave that window open?" he added.

"Window open? No indeed!" shrieked Mrs. Fairchild, and without further ceremony she brought forth her key and opened the front door.

Then she lit the lamp and began to make a search of the premises.

"They have been in here!" she wailed. "See how everything is upset!" She ran to a china closet. "Oh, dear, look at the dishes! Some of 'em broken! Oh!" She gave a wild scream. "The money is gone! They have robbed me of the four hundred dollars!"

CHAPTER XII

AT WORK IN THE DARK

DAVE had more than half expected the declaration the Widow Fairchild made, so when it came he was not surprised. The others, however, stared in bewilderment and dismay.

"All gone?" queried Mike Marcy.

"Every dollar!" groaned the widow. "Oh, the rascals, the heartless villains! To rob a poor widow in this fashion! And I worked so hard to save that money! Oh, where are they? I must catch them and get my money back!" And she stalked around the room wringing her hands in her despair.

"What a pity that we got here too late," said Dave. "I wish you had hurried more," he continued to the Irish-American farmer. "I told you not to waste time."

"Don't ye blame me for this!" replied Mike Marcy, half in alarm and half in wrath. "I hurried all I could."

"Let us make a search for the rascals," said Joel Burr. "They may not be very far off."

"It won't do any good," announced Farmer Brown. "We've been around here too long a-looking for 'em."

"Yes, they're a long way off by this time," said his son Bill. "With four hundred dollars in their pockets they won't let no grass grow under their feet."

"This is the third robbery inside of six weeks," was Joel Burr's comment. "Must say they be getting mighty free-handed."

In spite of what had been said, all went outside and took a look around the grounds and up and down the highway. But it was useless; not the least trace of the burglars could be found anywhere about.

While the others were outside, the widow inspected her house more thoroughly. She said a dozen silver spoons were missing and likewise an old gold watch and some old-fashioned gold and pearl jewelry. She placed her total loss at nearly five hundred dollars.

Dave had to tell his story in detail, to which all of the others but Mike Marcy listened with interest. The widow blamed the Irish-American farmer for not having come to the house sooner, declaring that had he done so the robbers would have been caught red-handed; and quite a war of words followed.

"What am I to do, now my money is gone?" she

wailed. "I cannot pay that carpenter's bill and it must be paid by the end of this month."

"You'll have to notify the constable, or the sheriff," answered Joel Burr.

"What good will that do? They haven't done anything for Lapham, nor for Jerry Logan who was robbed in Oakdale."

"Well, I don't know what you can do, widder."

Mrs. Fairchild declared, when she had settled down a little, that the man who had spoken to her about the sick baby had had a hoarse voice, and all were satisfied that that individual was one of those Dave had heard talk near the smokehouse. But she had not seen his face, so she could not give any description of him excepting to say that he was rather tall.

It was now nearly eleven o'clock, and as Dave had had no supper he was hungry. His tramping around had made him tired, and he said if he was not wanted any more he would go home.

"Go as far as I am concerned," said Mike Marcy. "But don't lay the blame of this robbery on me. Remember, ye had no right to be trespassin' on my property."

"I simply told the truth," said Dave; and a little later he withdrew and hurried forth into the night in the direction of Oak Hall.

It was a lonely road and a less courageous boy might have been frightened. It was cold and

quiet and he walked a full mile without meeting a soul. Then, as he was passing Mike Marcy's orchard, two figures sprang out in the darkness.

"Dave!"

"Hello, so it is you, Phil, and Roger! What brought you out again?"

"We came to find you. We were afraid you had gotten into trouble with Mike Marcy," answered Phil.

"Where in the world have you been?" asked the senator's son. "We reported that you had lost your watch, but didn't expect you'd stay away so long."

"Well, I've had troubles enough," answered Dave, with a faint smile, and as the three hurried for the academy he told his tale from beginning to end.

"Well, if this doesn't beat the Greeks!" exclaimed Phil. "Say, these robberies are getting serious."

"Are you going to tell Dr. Clay?" asked Roger.

"Certainly. I haven't done anything wrong, so why shouldn't I tell him?"

"I guess you are right. But I shouldn't disturb him to-night. It will be time enough to go to him in the morning."

Phil and Roger had gotten out of the Hall by a back way, leaving the door unlocked behind them.

The three boys, as a consequence, entered easily, and then Dave took the chance of being discovered by going down to the kitchen for something to eat. In the pantry he found a pumpkin pie, some cold beans, and some milk, and on these made a hearty repast. Then he went to bed and slept soundly until the bell awoke him at seven o'clock.

He felt that he should be reprimanded and he was not mistaken. Job Haskers strode up to him as soon as he went below.

"Master Porter, where were you last evening?" he demanded, in harsh tones.

"I lost my watch, Mr. Haskers, and went to look for it. Then something very unusual happened, which I am going to report to Dr. Clay."

"Something unusual, eh?" said the assistant teacher, curiously.

"Yes, sir. But I prefer to report to Dr. Clay."

"Hum! Very well—I will talk to the doctor myself later. We cannot permit pupils of this institution to come and go at will." And with an air of great importance Job Haskers passed on.

As soon as breakfast was over Dave went to Dr. Clay's private study. The worthy owner of Oak Hall was at his desk, looking over some letters which had just come in. He gazed at Dave in mild curiosity.

"Dr. Clay, may I speak to you for a few minutes?" asked the youth.

"Certainly, Porter. Come in and sit down."

Dave entered and closed the door after him, for he had caught sight of Job Haskers close at hand, curious to learn what he might have to say for himself. Sitting down he told his rather remarkable story, to which the master of the Hall listened with close attention.

"These robbers are certainly getting bold," said Dr. Clay. "It is a pity you could not get out of that smokehouse sooner."

"That is just what I told the others."

"You are certain you went over to Marcy's only for the kite and later for the watch?" and the doctor looked Dave squarely in the eyes.

"That's it, sir. I did not touch his apples or anything else, and neither did Phil nor Roger."

"Then he certainly had no right to lock you up. Do you wish to make a complaint against him?"

"No, not that. Only I wanted to explain why I didn't get back to school last evening."

"I see."

"Mr. Haskers approached me about it and acted as if he wanted to punish me."

"Ah! Well, you can tell him that I have taken the matter in hand and that you have been excused. I have but one fault to find, and that is——" The doctor paused and smiled.

"That we didn't catch the robbers," finished Dave.

"Exactly. The authorities must get after the rascals. Until they are caught nobody in this district will be safe."

After a few words more Dave left the office and went to his classroom. As he did this Job Haskers entered the doctor's office. He must have asked the master of Oak Hall about Dave, for after he came away he said nothing more to the youth concerning his absence.

The next few days went quietly by. From Lemond the boys learned that Mrs. Fairchild had appealed to the authorities and two detectives were at work searching for the robbers, but so far nothing had been learned about the rascals.

"They'll keep quiet for a while," said Ben, and such proved to be the case.

One afternoon a letter reached Oak Hall addressed to Roger Morr, Captain Oak Hall Football Club. It proved to be the expected challenge from Rockville Military Academy. The eleven of that institution challenged the Oak Hall team to play a game of football two weeks from that date, on some grounds to be mutually decided upon. Pinned to the challenge was a note stating a certain rich gentleman named Richard Mongrace had offered a fine gold cup to the winning team, providing the match was played on the new grounds laid out in his private park, located at Hilltop, six miles from the river.

"Here is the challenge at last," said Roger, and he read it aloud. "I suppose there is nothing to do but accept."

"Yes, we've got to give them the chance to even up," said Phil.

"They haven't forgotten that we beat them last season by a score of 11 to 8," said another of the eleven.

"I've heard something about their team this year," said Ben. "They have dropped three old players and have three A No. 1 fellows in their places. Two weeks ago, as you know, they beat the Hamilton eleven, 17 to 5, and day before yesterday they played White College eleven and won out by a score of 12 to 5."

"Then they must be a heap stronger than they were last year," said Buster Beggs. "For last year White College beat them badly."

"Yes, and Hamilton beat them too," added Dave. "I shouldn't wonder but that they've got a crackajack team this year."

"Are we going to back out?" demanded the senator's son.

"No!" came back in a chorus.

"Oak Hall never backs out!" cried Ben.

"Well, where are we to play? I suppose they would like to play at the Mongrace field," said Roger.

"It's a dandy spot—I was up there on my wheel

last Saturday," said Shadow Hamilton. "They've got a nice stand there, too."

"And our field is all lumpy," said Phil. "The doctor is going to have it leveled off next spring."

"Then let us go in for that gold cup!" cried Sam Day. And several others echoed the sentiment.

A regular meeting of the football club was called that night, and it was decided, after consulting Dr. Clay, to accept the Rockville challenge to play on the Mongrace grounds. A letter was accordingly written and forwarded the next Monday.

"Now we have got to brace up and practise," said the captain of the eleven.

"I wish you could get rid of two of our poorest players and take on Babcock and Henshaw," remarked Dave. "Those two would help us wonderfully."

"They both want to come in," answered the senator's son. "But I don't see how I can drop any of our present members after the way they have worked."

"Yes, I know that wouldn't be fair."

"I've already taken them on as substitutes. Maybe they'll get in the game after all," went on Roger.

Practice began in earnest during that week and all did their best to follow the coaching they got from the first assistant teacher, Andrew Dale, who had been both a college player and a coach. The

play was a trifle mixed at times, but the boys worked with a will and that counted for a good deal. But then came a letter calling one of the players home, to attend the funeral of an uncle.

"I've got to leave the eleven," said Luke Watson. "You'll have to get somebody to take my place."

"I am sorry to see you go," said Roger, sympathetically.

"Take Babcock," went on Luke. "You couldn't do better."

"I will," answered the senator's son.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

PAUL BABCOCK was more than glad to get on the eleven actively, and that afternoon he showed it in his practice. The work was snappy from start to finish and gave Mr. Dale great satisfaction.

"That is something like," declared the first assistant teacher. "Keep it up and you will surely win."

After the practice was over Babcock left the field in company with Dave. As the two strolled across the campus they passed Gus Plum, who scowled deeply at his former player.

"Plum doesn't like it that you've come over to us," observed Dave. "He looked like a regular thundercloud."

"He has nobody to blame but himself," answered Paul Babcock. "Even if his team were still in existence I'd never play with him again. I want to act on the square, and that is more than he wants to do."

"I've heard he wanted you to use foul play."

"Yes, he was at both Henshaw and me to do some dirty work. But we declined, and I told him I had a good mind to punch his nose for suggesting it. That made him boiling mad."

In due course of time came a letter from Mr. Richard Mongrace, stating he was glad to learn the match was to come off on his new grounds, and that he would do all in his power to make the two elevens and their friends comfortable. The golden cup he proposed to put up cost exactly one hundred dollars and was to belong to the school winning it twice in two or three games, one game a year to be played for it.

Dr. Clay knew Mr. Mongrace well and one day drove over to see the new grounds. He came back in an enthusiastic mood.

"Mr. Mongrace is certainly a fine man," said the master of Oak Hall. "He has with him a sick brother who cannot leave the estate. This brother used to be a famous football player on the Princeton team. For his benefit Mr. Mongrace has laid out the field, and he is going to have some of the best amateur teams in the country play there."

"That will cost some money," said Roger.

"Yes, but he is rich and can easily afford it. He has erected a fine grand stand and will also put up a big tent, where refreshments will be served to the visitors from both academies."

After that the doctor spoke about the coming

event before the whole school. He said he trusted that they would all act like young gentlemen while guests of Mr. Mongrace and thus do their institution credit.

The only persons at Oak Hall who did not look forward to the match with favor were Plum, Poole, and Jasniff. At first they thought to remain at home during the contest, but afterwards changed their minds, the reason being a plan which Nick Jasniff proposed.

Jasniff was thoroughly unscrupulous, and a year before had been dismissed from another boarding academy because of his dishonorable actions. He was a lad who was willing to do almost anything to accomplish his end.

Jasniff's plan was nothing more or less than to play a trick on some members of Roger's eleven, so that they could not take part in the game. This would weaken the Oak Hall club to such an extent that they would be likely to lose.

"Can we do it?" asked Poole.

"Certainly we can," answered Nick Jasniff. "Why, such things have been done hundreds of times."

"Well, what do you propose?" asked Gus Plum.

"I'll tell you to-morrow. I've got to think it over."

"I wish I was dead sure Oak Hall would lose,"

whispered the bully of the school. "We might make some money by the operation."

"So we could!" cried Nat Poole. "All the Rockville boys are betting they will win."

"And we could bet the same way," said Jasniff, with a leer. "Only we'll have to put up our money through some outsider."

"I can fix that," said Gus Plum. "I know a fellow in Oakdale who will do it for us."

The day set for the great football match dawned bright and clear. As soon as they could get away from their school duties Roger's eleven went out for a short practice and Henshaw and the other substitutes with them. Henshaw was sorry he was not on the regular team, but said little about it.

While the practice was going on, Plum, Poole, and Jasniff watched all the players closely, trying to gain the knowledge of some tricks and signals, which they hoped later to divulge to the Rockville eleven.

The practice at an end, Babcock announced that he wanted to go to a place called Leeton on an errand. Leeton was a small railroad crossing two miles from the school, where Babcock had a relative living.

"Wouldn't you like to go with me?" he asked Dave. "We can go over on our bicycles and be back inside of an hour."

Dave was willing, thinking the short spin on a

wheel would do him good. They soon set off, and before long were well on the road.

"There's our chance!" cried Nick Jasniff, as he and his cronies watched the departure. "Just what I wanted!"

"Shall we go after them?" asked Plum.

"Sure!"

The bully and the others had bicycles—indeed nearly every youth at Oak Hall had one, for the craze was at its height. The three set off without delay, following the same road Dave and Babcock had taken.

Unconscious of the fact that they were being followed, Dave and his companion spun along. There was a winding road, across a brook, then up a hill, and over another small hill to the railroad crossing. At several places pedaling was rather difficult, but they did not mind it, being fresh and with good wind.

Arriving at the railroad crossing, Babcock stopped at the house for which he was bound and executed his errand. Then the two lads got a drink of water at the well and started on the return.

"I'll race you back!" cried Babcock.

"Better not race to-day," cautioned Dave. "We want to save our strength for the game."

"All right, Dave, just as you say. But a little race wouldn't hurt me."

Not far from Leeton the road made a sharp turn, coming up close to the railroad tracks. Here there was a steep down grade for three hundred feet. As the boys neared the turn they began to coast, thinking the way perfectly clear.

They were almost to the bottom of the hill when something happened that filled them with alarm. Close to the side of the roadway stood a tall, slim tree. As they came up the tree fell directly in their path.

"Look out!" yelled Dave, who was in advance, and then his bicycle struck the tree and he was pitched headlong over the handle-bars. Babcock also took a tumble, and both lads came down violently at the side of the road, where there was a gully filled with rocks and hard dirt. Both slid along, turned over, and then lay still.

A full minute passed and neither Dave nor Babcock offered to get up. Then from out of the bushes near by Plum, Poole, and Jasniff emerged.

"We caught 'em right enough," muttered Jasniff. "The tree came down just in time."

"Ar—are they hu—hurt much!" faltered Nat Poole. His face was as white as death itself.

"They are certainly knocked out," answered Nick Jasniff, coolly.

"Oh, I hope they ain't dead!" gasped Poole, his knees beginning to shake.

"They are not dead," announced Gus Plum, who

Both lads came down violently at the side of the road.
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was bending over the fallen youths. "They are stunned, that's all." And he breathed a short sigh of relief, for he had been fearful of serious results.

"We had better get away, before they come to their senses and recognize us," went on Poole, who was the most timid-hearted of the unworthy trio.

While they were deliberating they heard the whistle of a locomotive on the railroad and soon a long train of empty freight cars came into view. Then, when about half the train had gone by, the cars came to a sudden halt, brought to a stop because of a danger signal at the crossing.

"What's the freight train stopping for?" asked Plum.

"Don't ask me," answered Nick Jasniff. "But I say," he added suddenly. "The very thing!"

"What?"

"Let us put 'em both in one of the empty cars!"

"Oh, don't bother!" answered Nat Poole, who, had he had his choice, would have wheeled away without delay.

"They are only stunned—they'll soon come around," went on Jasniff. "If we leave them here they may get in the game anyway. We may as well send them off to parts unknown!"

This plan appealed strongly to Gus Plum, and both he and Jasniff walked to the train and looked

up and down the long line of empty cars. Not a soul was in sight.

"The coast is clear," said Jasniff. "Come on, we can do it in a jiffy, and nobody will be the wiser."

They went over to Babcock, raised him up, and carried him to the nearest of the cars. The sliding door was wide open, and they pushed the unconscious form half across the car floor. Then they ran back and picked up Dave. At that moment came the whistle of the locomotive.

"Hurry up, they are going to start!" said Jasniff, and they lost no time in pushing Dave into the car. Then Jasniff rolled the door shut.

"Might as well lock 'em in," he suggested, but before he could accomplish his purpose the train gave a jerk and went on its way. All three of the students stared at it and watched it out of sight.

"They are gone, that's sure," murmured Gus Plum. His heart was beating violently.

"Yes, and they won't come back in a hurry," chuckled Nick Jasniff.

"Maybe they will be carried clear to New York," said Nat Poole.

"If they are, so much the better."

"You are sure they weren't seriously hurt?"

"I guess not."

"If they are, and we are found out——"

"Who is going to tell on us?" demanded Nick Jasniff. "Don't you dare to open your trap, Nat."

"Oh, I shan't say a word."

"Nobody saw us," said Gus Plum. "So, if we keep quiet, nobody will ever know we had anything to do with it."

"What about the wheels?"

"Leave them right where they are. Somebody will pick them up sooner or later. Both are marked Oak Hall and have the initials on them."

"Well, what are we to do next?" asked Gus Plum, after an awkward pause.

"Get out of here and wheel over to Oakdale," answered Nick Jasniff, who had become the leader of the unworthies. "We can put our money in the hands of Lancaster and he can put it up on Rockville for us. We are now sure to win."

"Morr will put Henshaw in Babcock's place," said Poole, as they rode away.

"Will he? Not after Henshaw has had his dinner," and Nick Jasniff winked knowingly.

"Do you mean to dose him?" asked Plum.

"I guess I will. I sit close to him and I can drop a little powder in his food which will make him feel weak and dizzy all the afternoon."

"Have you got the powder?"

"I can get it from Lancaster. He told me about it several days ago."

"It isn't poison, is it?" asked Nat Poole. He

was beginning to grow afraid of Nick Jasniff's bold ways.

"No, it won't hurt him a bit, only make him weak and light-headed for a few hours."

"Then give it to him by all means," urged Gus Plum. "With Porter, Babcock, and Henshaw out of the game Rockville is bound to beat, and if we make the right kind of bets we ought to win a pot of money!"

CHAPTER XIV

CARRIED OFF

WHEN Dave came to his senses he found himself rolling around the floor of the freight car. The door was three-quarters shut and the train was winding its way around several uneven curves.

He put his hand to his forehead. There was a big lump near his left eye and his left hand was bleeding from several scratches. The car was full of dust and he began to cough.

"What a fearful tumble!" he muttered to himself, and then sat up and stared around him. "Where in the world am I?"

He had expected to find himself beside the highway; instead he was boxed in and moving along at a speed of twenty or more miles an hour. He glanced through the open doorway and saw the trees and rocks flashing by. It took him all of a minute to collect his scattered senses, and then he gazed around the dust-laden car. Only a few feet away lay the form of Babcock. The youth was breathing heavily.

"Paul!" he called out. "Paul! What does this mean? Did you bring me here?"

There was no answer, and on his hands and knees he bent over his friend. Then he gave Babcock a shake, and the hurt one opened his eyes.

"The tree—look out for the tree!" he murmured and struggled to a sitting position.

"Paul, did you bring me here?" went on Dave.

"Me? Here? What do you mean? Where am I?" stammered Babcock, and then he, too, stared out of the doorway of the freight car. "Well, I never!"

It was not until several minutes later that the pair comprehended the truth of the fact that they were in a freight car that was moving along at a good rate of speed and that they had been put in the car by some party or parties unknown.

"This certainly beats the Dutch!" cried Dave. "Are you hurt much?"

"I am pretty well shaken up, and my shoulder is a little lame, Dave. How about you?"

"I've got this lump and those scratches, that's all."

"You went into that tree and so did I. Do you remember what happened after that?"

"No."

"Neither do I. Somebody must have put us in here. Who was it?"

"Don't ask me, and don't ask me where we are going either, for I haven't the least idea."

The two students talked the matter over for fully five minutes, but could reach no conclusion. At first they fancied that they might have been robbed, but nothing was missing but their wheels.

"This is a mystery we must solve later," said Dave. "The present question is, How are we to get off this train and get back to the Hall?"

A moment later the freight train passed through a small lumber town. They heard a mill whistle blowing. Dave pulled out his watch.

"Why, Paul, it is twelve o'clock!"

"Nonsense!" Babcock consulted his own timepiece. "You are right! And we were going to be back to the Hall by dinner time!"

"Don't forget that to-day is the day for the great football match."

"Creation! Do you know it slipped my mind for the moment! Why, Dave, we must get back!"

"I agree with you."

"Let us get off the train at once."

"What, with the cars running at twenty-five or thirty miles an hour! No, thank you! We've had one bad tumble, I don't want a second."

Babcock looked out of the doorway. The lumber town had been left behind and they were running through a dense woods. How far they were from Leeton and Oak Hall they could not tell.

"I wish we could signal the engineer, I'd soon stop the train," said Dave.

"Can't we crawl to the top of the car?"

"We might if we were regular train hands, but as greenies we had better not risk it."

Another mile was passed, and the train began to go around another curve. Then came a steep upgrade and the speed of the cars was slackened.

"We're slowing up!" cried Babcock. "Maybe we can jump for it now."

The locomotive was puffing laboriously, and presently the train seemed to do little but crawl along. The boys looked at each other.

"Shall we go?" asked Dave.

"Yes."

"All right, here goes!"

Dave swung himself down and made a jump in safety. Fifty feet further on Paul Babcock did the same. Then the long freight train rolled by, a brakeman on the caboose gazing at them curiously as it passed.

"Well, where are we?" asked Babcock, gazing around with interest.

"On the line of the D. S. & B. railroad," answered Dave, with a grim smile.

"I know that well enough, but where on the line?"

"Some miles from Leeton. The question is, Shall we walk back on the track?"

"I don't know of anything else to do. We can find out where we are when we reach that lumber town where we heard the whistle blowing."

They walked along the track for all of a mile and a half and then came in sight of the lumber town, which consisted of nothing but the mill, one general store, and a dozen frame houses. It was now nearly one o'clock and the men of the mill were preparing to resume their day's labor.

"What town is this?" asked Dave, of a boy they met.

"This town is Mill Run," answered the youth.

"How far is it to Leeton?"

"About twelve miles."

"Twelve miles!" ejaculated Babcock.

"Yes, and maybe more."

"Do you know when we can get back to Leeton?"

"Not till seven-thirty to-night. There are only two passenger trains a day on this line."

"Well, we've got to get back before to-night," said Dave, decidedly. "We've got to get back right now."

"I don't see how you are going to do it," said the boy. "Ain't no train, nor stage, nor nuthin."

"Can't we hire some sort of a carriage?" queried Babcock. "We won't mind the expense." He came from a well-to-do family and had ample spending money.

"Might git old Si Ross to drive you over."

"Who is Si Ross?"

"Used to run the stage from here to Leeton before the railroad went through."

"Will you show us his place?"

"Of course," answered the boy and took them through the lumber town and to a small shanty on the outskirts. Here they found Si Ross, a bent-over old man who was rather hard of hearing.

"Hi, Si!" called out the boy. "These fellers want you to drive 'em over to Leeton."

"They're arrivin' from Leeton?" queried the old man.

"No, they want you to drive 'em over—*drive 'em over!*" shrieked the boy.

"Me drive 'em over?"

"Yes," said Dave and Babcock at the top of their voices, and nodded vigorously.

"Cost ye two an' a half."

"All right. Can you do it right away?" went on Dave.

"O' course I know the way."

"Can you do it *right away!*" screamed Dave.

"Sure—soon as I kin hitch up."

"*Hurry up!*" yelled Babcock. "We want to get there as soon as possible."

"I'll git ye there soon enough, don't ye fear," said Si Ross, and hobbled off to his barn. He brought forth a bony horse and shoved out a

rickety road wagon and began to hook up. The boy helped him.

"That doesn't look very promising," remarked Babcock.

"Is this the best turnout in town?" asked Dave, of the boy.

"It's the only one you can git," was the answer.

At last Si Ross was ready to leave and the two students got up on the rear seat of the wagon, Dave first giving the boy ten cents for his trouble, which pleased the urchin immensely. Then Si Ross pulled himself to the front seat, provided himself with a fresh chew of tobacco, and took up the reins.

"Gee dap!" he sqeaked to the bony horse and the animal started off on a walk. Then the driver cracked his whip and soon the steed was making fairly good time over the lonely country road.

Again the boys consulted their watches and found it was now half-past one o'clock. The football game was scheduled to start at half-past three.

"Two hours to get there in," said Dave. "We'll never make it."

"I think we ought to start for Mr. Mongrace's place direct," said Babcock.

"But we haven't our football togs."

"Perhaps Roger will take them along, or we may be able to borrow some. One thing is certain, we haven't time to return to Oak Hall for them."

"Do you know where Mr. Mongrace's estate is?" asked Dave, in a loud tone of the driver.

"Yes—very fine place," was the answer.

"Can you take us there?"

"How?"

"*Can you take us there?*"

"Sure. But I thought you wanted to go to Leeton?"

"We must get to Mr. Mongrace's by half-past three!" called out Dave.

"I can make it—but we'll have to hurry."

"Go ahead then."

"Three dollars."

"*All right!*" yelled Babcock, and felt in his pocket. "Oh, pshaw! I've only got a dollar and a quarter with me!"

"Never mind, I've got it," said Dave, and brought out the necessary bank bills.

The sight of the cash was inspiring to Si Ross, and he urged his bony nag along at a faster gait than ever. They passed over one small hill and then came out on a highway which was in excellent condition.

"I'd like to know who put us in that freight car," said Dave, as they rattled along. "Do you know, I've half an idea the whole thing was a put-up job. That tree seemed to fall down right in front of us and I don't see what should make it fall. There was hardly any wind blowing."

"It was certainly a curious piece of business all the way through," returned Paul Babcock. "We'll have to start an investigation after the game. And we must try to recover our bicycles too."

"Do you think any of the Rockville fellows would be mean enough to play such a trick on us?"

"I don't know. Whoever it was took big chances. Why, we might have been killed!"

"Well, it wasn't done by footpads, otherwise we should have been robbed."

"That is true. Well, the best thing we can—— Whoa! What's the matter!"

"The horse is running away!"

"The back-strap is broken!"

There was no time to say more, for the wagon was swaying from side to side. Then came a turn, and a second later the vehicle ran off into a gully. Crash! went one of the front wheels, and over went the body. The horse came to a standstill and Si Ross slid into some bushes, followed by the two students.

"Smashed!" wailed the old driver, as he got up and surveyed the wreck.

"And that ends our hope of getting to the football field in time," added Babcock dolefully.

CHAPTER XV

OFF FOR THE GAME

"WHERE in the world can Dave and Paul be keeping themselves?"

It was Roger who spoke. He and the others had had their dinner and were out on the campus doing a last bit of practising before starting for Mr. Mongrace's place.

"They certainly should have been here long ago," returned Phil. "They won't have time to get their dinner."

"I wonder if Gus Plum and his crowd met them on the road," said Sam. "They were out on their wheels."

"I'll ask them," said Shadow, and ran off to do so. He met Nat Poole at the doorway to the Hall.

"Say, Nat, did you see anything of Dave Porter and Paul Babcock when you were out on your wheel?" he asked.

Nat Poole started at the direct question and his face changed color. But he quickly recovered.

"No, I didn't see them," he answered. "What makes you ask?"

"They are missing and I know you were out on your wheel and they went out too—over to Leeton."

"We went to Oakdale," said Nat, and turned away, for fear of being questioned further. He, Plum, and Jasniff had arranged it between them to say they had been to Oakdale and nowhere else.

Shadow Hamilton returned to his friends and related what Poole had said. Some of the students had already departed for the football field, going on their wheels and in one of the carriages belonging to the place. The football club was to take the carryall, and turnouts had been engaged for all who were to witness the game.

Soon Andrew Dale came out to see if the team was ready. He was greatly surprised when he learned that Dave and Paul were missing.

"It may be they have been delayed," said he, "and if that is so, they may have gone direct from Leeton to the Mongrace estate. I think there is a fairly good road."

"Perhaps that is so," answered the senator's son, brightening a little. "But they ought to have come here—they knew I should be worried."

"You had better take their suits along. We can leave word here about the suits—in case they come after we are gone."

Swiftly the minutes went by until the club could

wait no longer. Then into the carryall they piled, regulars and substitutes, taking the outfits of the missing players with them. Jackson Lemond was to drive, and with a crack of the whip they were off. Usually the boys would have been noisy and full of fun, but now they were sober.

"Paul told me he would surely be back," said Henshaw. "I am afraid something has happened to him."

"Maybe they got a tumble," suggested Buster Beggs. "But it would be queer if they both got caught at the same time."

The boys had brought their horns and rattles with them, yet they made little noise as they rode along, much to the satisfaction of Jackson Lemond, who had been afraid they would scare the horses and cause them to bolt. Yet the Hall driver was sorry to see them so blue.

"Ain't feelin' much like playin', I take it," he observed.

"It is not that, Horsehair," answered Roger. "We are alarmed over the absence of Dave Porter and Paul Babcock."

"Got to have 'em to play, eh?"

"Well, they belong on the regular eleven."

"Maybe they went ahead," said the Hall driver, hopefully.

The roads were in good condition, and soon they reached the broad highway leading directly to the

Mongrace estate. On this road they met a score of turnouts all bound for the football field.

"Hurrah! There are the Oak Hall fellows!"

"Hope you win, boys!"

"You've got to put up a stiff game if you want to come out ahead this season. Rockville has got a dandy team."

So the cries ran on, while horns were blown and rattles used. Then a big stage lumbered up, carrying a number of students from Rockville in their natty military uniforms.

"This is the time we'll wax you!"

"After this game Oak Hall won't be in it!"

"Bet you two to one we beat you!"

"Bet your small change on that, or you'll be a beggar!" cried one of the Oak Hall boys in return.

"We'll race you to the grounds!" said a Rockville student. "Get up there!" he cried to the horses pulling the stage. The whip was used and the turnout bounded ahead.

"Here, this won't do, Horsehair!" cried Phil. "We can't let them beat us on the road like this. Start up the team."

Now, if there was one thing that Lemond took pride in, it was his horses, and seldom was it that he allowed anybody to pass him on the road. Dr. Clay kept good animals, and Horsehair saw to it that they were always in the best of condition.

Moreover, he and the driver for Rockville were as bitter rivals as the students themselves.

"Ain't goin' to pass us to-day!" said he, setting his teeth. "Git up!" and he snapped his whip in a manner that meant business.

The horses understood, and in a moment more a race was on in earnest. Stage and carryall streaked down the broad road side by side, all of the students shrieking themselves hoarse.

"Go it, Horsehair! Don't let them beat us!"

"Send 'em ahead, Jerry! We can't take the dust of Oak Hall!"

Faster and faster went stage and carryall and now the two drivers settled down to the race in earnest. Then came a turn and the Oak Hall turnout shot ahead.

"Good for you, Horsehair!" yelled Phil. "Keep it up!"

"Catch him, Jerry, catch him!" came from behind.

"You can't catch us to-day!" flung back Buster Beggs. "Good-by! We'll tell 'em you are coming!" Then the carryall swept up to some private carriages, passed them, and left the Rockville stage in the dust of the road behind.

The little brush served to brighten up Roger and his companions, and as they drew close to the football field they blew their horns and sounded their rattles. When they swept into the grounds

they were greeted with cheers, and Oak Hall flags were waved everywhere.

It was certainly a fine football field, as level as a house floor and well roped off. To one side was a neat grand stand, painted green and white, and decorated with flags and bunting. At the far end of the field was a big tent, where the refreshments were to be served, and opposite the grand stand was a special inclosure for any outsiders who cared to witness the contest. Each school was well represented by its followers, and there were fully a thousand spectators in addition.

"We couldn't have a nicer day nor a better crowd," remarked Phil, as he gazed around.

"Do you see anything of Dave and Paul?" questioned Roger, anxiously.

All looked around quickly and then hurried to the dressing room under the grand stand. Not a sign of the missing players was to be seen anywhere.

"We've got fifteen minutes yet," said Roger. "They may show up at any minute."

"Are all the Rockville players here?" asked Ben.

"Yes, and they look as if they meant business, too," answered Buster Beggs.

The grand stand had been divided into three parts, the middle for the owner of the estate and his special friends, and either end for the two schools. In the best position on the stand was the sick

brother of the owner of the estate, propped up in an invalid's chair. His face wore a smile, as if he enjoyed everything that was going on.

In an extreme corner of the Oak Hall end of the stand sat Gus Plum, Nat Poole, and Nick Jasniff. They were awaiting the outcome of the game with deep interest, although sure that their school would lose. Through a friend in Oakdale they had placed practically all their spending money on bets in favor of Rockville,—in fact Gus Plum had gone into debt twenty dollars, borrowing the amount from a student named Chadworth.

"Say, are you sure you fixed Henshaw?" whispered the bully of the Hall to Jasniff. "He doesn't look to be very sick or dizzy-headed."

"Oh, I fixed him right enough," returned Nick Jasniff. "Maybe the stuff hasn't had time to work."

"Or maybe you didn't give him enough," commented Nat Poole.

"I gave him the dose called for. Of course I didn't dare to give him too much."

"I don't see anything of Porter or Babcock," went on Poole, with a side wink at his cronies.

"No, it's funny where they are," answered Gus Plum, in a loud voice.

"Maybe they got afraid to play," added Jasniff, in an equally loud tone.

It soon became noised around that Dave and

Paul had failed to show themselves, and Dr. Clay himself came from the grand stand to see about it. But nobody could give him any information.

"Something must have happened to detain them," said the owner of the Hall. "They would certainly get here if they could."

At last it was time to go out on the field for practice. Henshaw was put in Babcock's place, as he was able to play the position almost as well as anybody, and a lad named Farrell took the position reserved for Dave.

"There goes Henshaw out," said Nat Poole, in a low voice. "He seems to be all right."

"Why shouldn't he be all right?" demanded a student sitting behind the speaker.

"I wasn't talking to you, Dodd."

"Well, why shouldn't Henshaw be all right?" insisted Dodd.

"Why,—er—somebody said he wasn't feeling well, that's all," stammered Nat Poole.

"He told me he was feeling bang-up."

"That so? Well, I'm glad to hear it," said Poole, weakly.

As a matter of fact Henshaw was feeling just a bit faint and dizzy, the drug not having had time to have its full effect. Luckily the lad was strong and with a good heart action, so he was bound to suffer less than had he been otherwise.

There was a cheer for the Oak Hall players and

another cheer when the Rockville eleven appeared on the field. The practice of each team was snappy and vigorous and brought forth applause.

The umpire and the referee were college men, chosen by Mr. Dale and a teacher from Rockville, and the linesmen were others acceptable all around. The practice over, there was a five minutes' intermission.

"Dave and Babcock are not here yet," sighed Phil, "I declare, it's too bad! If we have many accidents on the field we'll be more than shorthanded."

"They wouldn't stay away of their own accord," said Roger. "Something is wrong—I'm dead sure of it."

It had been decided that the two halves of the game should be of thirty minutes each, with an intermission of ten minutes. Roger, Phil, Ben, and Buster Beggs occupied the positions they had filled the season previous, and the others of the eleven were placed to the best advantage. The center and the right guard were a little weak, but this could not be helped. On the other hand, the Rockville eleven appeared to be exceptionally well balanced.

"Time to play!" cried Phil, presently, and the eleven at once took their positions. Then the Rockville men came on the field once more; and a minute later the great game started.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREAT FOOTBALL GAME

At the best it is next to impossible to describe all the plays made in a fast and snappy football game, and I shall not attempt to do so. From the very outset Rockville Academy demonstrated the fact that they had come to win or die trying, and they were alert to a degree that brought forth admiration even from their enemies.

The toss-up was won by Rockville, and the center kicked off amid a breathless silence. The leather sailed in Sam Day's direction and he caught it and brought it back twelve yards. Ben Basswood was called to kick and sent it off to the forty-five-yard line. It was caught, but lost to Phil Lawrence, who managed to tear around the end for five yards. Then followed a mix-up, and the ball went back and forth four times, when it went out of bounds and brought a loss to Rockville of two yards.

The whole crowd by this time was wild with excitement, and every advance by one side or the other was hailed with cheers, the tooting of horns, and the swinging of rattles.

"Phew! but this is hard work, sure enough," whispered Phil to Roger. "They are pushing things for all they are worth."

"I believe they think they can wind us," answered the senator's son.

The ball was put into play a few seconds later. "Twelve, twenty-six, fifty!" was the signal, and it passed rapidly from one Rockville player to another. Then came a sensational run of twenty yards, the tackle with the ball rushing Oak Hall's left end. But the fullback was after him and brought him down just as it looked as if Rockville might score a touchdown.

"Say, look at that run!"

"I thought he was going to make it, sure!"

"So did I!"

"They'll get it anyway, see if they don't!"

So the cries ran on as the two elevens lined up for the next scrimmage. The first half was now eighteen minutes old, and exactly two minutes later, despite the best efforts of Oak Hall, the leather was forced over the line by the military academy boys.

"Hurrah! A touchdown for Rockville!"

"That's the way to do it!"

And then the crowd cheered harder than ever—that is, those who sympathized with the military academy. Oak Hall and its supporters sat silent, and a few shook their heads and sighed.

"Didn't I tell you?" whispered Nick Jasniff, to Plum and Poole. "There's the first dose. That money is as good as won!"

"It suits me right enough," answered the bully of Oak Hall. He did not add that he was very low on cash and that his father had written, stating that he could not supply Gus with any more spending money for a long time to come.

As soon as the touchdown was made the leather was hurried to the field for a kick. It sailed directly between the goal posts, and at this another yell went up.

"Six points for Rockville! That's the way to do it!"

"Now then for another, fellows! Show 'em that is only a starter!"

With eight more minutes of the first half left the ball was put into play and once more it was sent back and forth. Once Roger made a clever run of fifteen yards and at another time, when a Rockville player made a fumble, Phil snatched the ball, sent it to Ben, who turned it over to Henshaw. With the leather in his arm Henshaw made a brave attempt for a touchdown, but was stopped on the thirty-yard line. His run, however, was loudly applauded, and for the time being it gave Jasniff, Plum, and Poole a chill.

"Phew!" muttered Plum. "I thought he was going straight over!"

"He's the best player they've got," whispered Jasniff. "I can't understand why that drug doesn't work."

But the drug was working, and it was that which prevented Henshaw from making the touchdown after covering twenty yards. He was growing more dizzy each moment.

"I must be getting the blind staggers," he said to Roger. "Everything seems to be swimming in front of my eyes."

"Maybe you ran too hard," suggested the senator's son.

"No, I've been feeling that way for the past five minutes. I don't know what's the matter with me."

"Do you want to quit?"

"Oh, I'll try to play the half out," answered Henshaw.

With the ball on the thirty-yard line, Oak Hall fought as never before to carry the leather on. It did go down to the twenty-yard line, but only to be lost on a fumble, after which a succession of brilliant rushes and end runs by Rockville brought it within striking distance of Oak Hall's goal line, when a drop kick sent it once more between the posts.

"Will you look at that!"

"A goal from the field! That gives Rockville 10 points!"

The cheering and the general din were tremendous. Oak Hall had nothing to say. Plum and his cronies chuckled to themselves.

"Rockville is rubbing it in, eh?" chuckled Nick Jasniff. "I hope they make it about 50 to 0!"

"So do I," answered Nat Poole.

Once more the ball went into play, and this time Oak Hall sent it into the Rockville territory in a grim, stone-wall way that could not be resisted. But when it lacked still ten yards of the goal line, the whistle blew, telling that time was up and the first half of the game had come to an end.

"Hard luck to-day," said Phil, grimly. "They are certainly putting up a great game."

"They have more weight than we have," answered Shadow. "And I must say, their tackling is first-class."

"I think it is rough," said Buster Beggs. "I got a kick in the shin that wasn't pleasant."

"That Hausermann is rather rough," said Phil. "I'd hate to have him come down on me."

"Yes, and he plays off-side," said Roger. "I had to warn him twice, and the referee warned him too."

Poor Henshaw was now so dizzy he could scarcely stand and two of the other players had to escort him off the field. Andrew Dale questioned the youth closely.

"You didn't eat or drink anything unusual?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Did you ever feel that way before when playing?"

"No, sir, it never affected me in the least."

"It is odd. I will call Dr. Blarcom, who is present."

The doctor came up and made a close examination. He was much puzzled. He also asked Henshaw about his eating and drinking. Then, when the lad complained of feeling sick at the stomach, he gave him an emetic.

"He has certainly swallowed something that hasn't agreed with him," said the physician, and took Henshaw to the Mongrace mansion, where he might give the sick student every attention.

With Henshaw, Babcock, and Dave out of the game, Roger hardly knew what to do for players. The lad who had taken Dave's place was only an ordinary player, and to put another ordinary player in place of Henshaw would be to weaken the eleven greatly.

"It certainly looks like a walk-over for Rockville," said the senator's son. "I can't understand what is keeping Dave and Paul away."

But four minutes of the intermission had passed when there came a sudden shout from outside of the grand-stand dressing rooms. Then with a whirr a big red automobile dashed up and two dusty-looking youths leaped out.

"Dave and Paul!" ejaculated Phil, joyously. "Where in the world have you been?"

"Is the game over?" asked Dave, anxiously.

"The first half is."

"What's the score?" questioned Babcock, quickly.

"10 to 0 against us."

"Is that so!"

"But where have you been?" demanded Roger, and added, almost in the same breath: "Can you play?"

"Certainly we can play—that is what we are here for," returned Dave. "Will somebody lend me a football suit?"

"We have your suits here," said Shadow, and brought them forth. "Climb right in."

Dave and Babcock did "climb in," and while doing so briefly related their adventures.

"When the old wagon went to smash we thought we were surely out of the game," said Dave. "But a few minutes later a man came along in that automobile, and we stopped him and got him to promise to bring us here. We would have gotten here in time for the first half only something got the matter with the auto's batteries."

"Dave, some enemies played that trick," said Phil.

"No doubt of it."

"They wanted us to lose the game."

"Of course," said Babcock.

"Do you suspect any of the Rockville fellows?"

"Not yet. I am going to investigate after this game is over."

"And I am going to investigate, too," added Dave. "Why, we might have been killed!"

The youth who had taken Dave's place on the eleven was perfectly willing to retire, feeling that Oak Hall was going to lose anyway. Babcock took his old place.

"I am sorry for Spud," he said, referring to Henshaw. "It appears to me that something is wrong all around."

With the appearance of Dave and Babcock the spirits of Roger, Phil, and the others arose wonderfully.

"Now, boys, play for all you are worth," said the senator's son. "Make every scrimmage count, and if you get hold of the ball run like all-possessed. We must get something this half, or we'll never hear the end of it."

"It will certainly make Gus Plum and his cronies crow," answered Dave, grimly. "I suppose they are here?"

"Yes, in a corner of the stand," answered Buster Beggs.

"They were out on their wheels this morning," said Sam Day. "Did you see anything of them?"

"They were out?" repeated Dave, in surprise. "Did they follow us?"

"They said they went to Oakdale."

Dave looked at Paul Babcock, who pursed up his lips meditatively.

"What do you think of that, Paul?"

"I think it will stand investigation," answered Babcock. "Somebody played us the trick, and it certainly wasn't a friend."

"Last year Plum and Poole were against us."

At that moment came a call from the doorway of the dressing room.

"Time for the second half, boys. Come out on the field."

It had become noised around that Dave and Babcock had arrived. A number believed this, but others did not.

"Do you think it is true?" demanded Plum of Jasniff.

"I don't see how it can be," whispered Jasniff in return. "They must have been carried miles and miles on that freight train."

"Oh, it's only talk," grumbled Nat Poole.

The eleven were now pouring into the field. Among the first to show themselves were Dave and Paul, and a roar of welcome went up from the Oak Hall supporters.

"There are Porter and Babcock!"

"Now for some real playing!"

"Where in the world have they been?"

"They are here, sure enough!" whispered Gus Plum, hoarsely. "Nick, what can it mean?"

"Don't ask me," growled Jasniff. "It beats anything I ever heard of!"

As soon as they came on the field Dave and Babcock reported to the referee, as substitutes for the two players that had dropped out. Then the whistle blew, and the second half of the great game was on.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW THE GAME ENDED

THERE was another spell of breathless silence as the ball went into play on the second half of the great game. The kick-off was clean and clever, and for several minutes the leather remained close to the center of the field, each eleven struggling desperately to force the line of the other. Rockville had had one man slightly hurt and another player had taken his place, one who was light and very wiry. He took the ball for a run around the left end, but was brought down. Then in the scrimmage that followed the ball came to Dave and he made a gain of ten yards, breaking through and dodging in a manner that brought forth much favorable comment.

"That's the way to do it," was the cry. "Carry it over the line!"

But alas! for the hopes of Oak Hall. In the very next mix-up Buster Beggs made a bad fumble and the wiry substitute on the Rockville eleven secured the leather. Before anybody could stop

him he made a sensational run to the end of the field.

"Another touchdown for Rockville!"

How the supporters of the military academy did cheer and yell! Horns tooted madly and the academy colors went waving in all directions.

Gus Plum grinned silently, while Nick Jasniff winked at him.

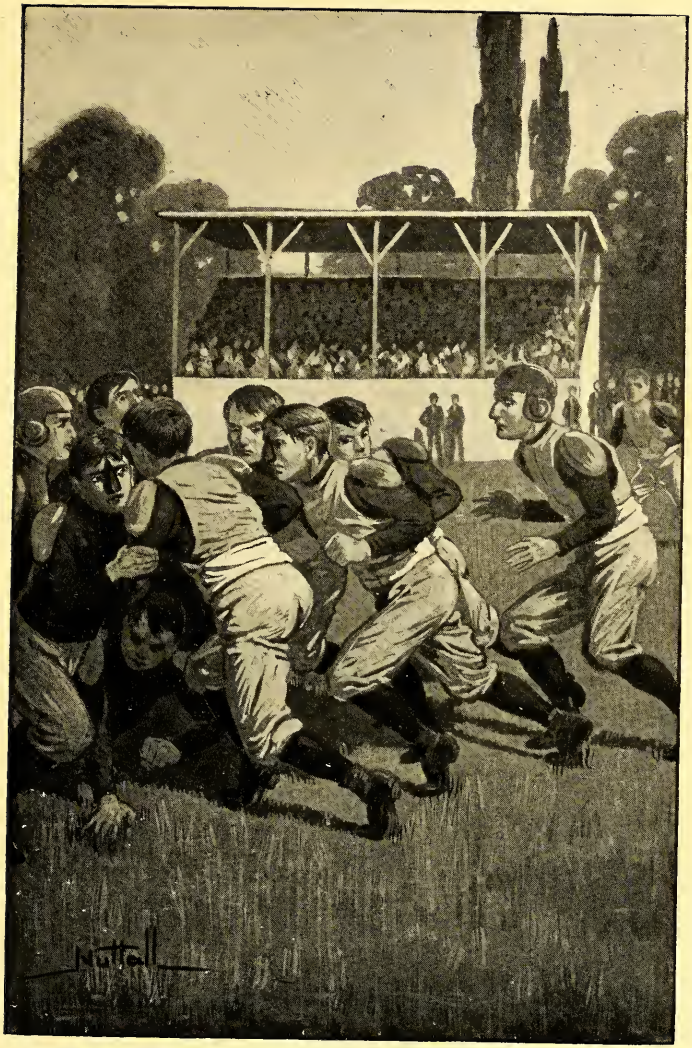
"Say, we're all right, after all, eh?" whispered Nat Poole.

"Hush!" muttered the bully of the school. "If our fellows should hear you they'd kill us! This defeat will make them ugly."

The touchdown was turned into a goal, giving Rockville 16 points as against 0 for Oak Hall. Things certainly did look blue.

"Come, fellows, we've got to do something!" urged Roger. "Everybody play for all he is worth. Don't let a single chance escape you!"

"I am going to do something if I die for it," said Babcock, and went in with a vigor that nothing could resist. Inside of two minutes he secured the ball, dove to the left, turned, and started for the right. Two Rockville players tackled him, but Dave and Buster Beggs came between and Babcock went on. Then Roger took a hand, and in the struggle the ball went over the Rockville line amid a yelling from Oak Hall that could have been heard half a mile.



Like a living wedge Oak Hall struck against Rockville.
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"A touchdown for Oak Hall!"

"Now wake up, boys, and show 'em what you can do!"

Dave held the ball and Roger made the kick. The ball went through the posts fairly, scoring 6 points for the Hall. Again came a cheer.

"Well, it's only 6 to 16," whispered Nat Poole.

"How much longer to play?" asked Plum.

"Fourteen minutes."

The six points gained put increased vigor into Oak Hall, and now Roger gave the signal for a certain mass play which had as yet not been tried. Like a living wedge Oak Hall struck against Rockville, and although the academy eleven carried more weight they could not withstand such an onslaught. They separated, and in a twinkling the leather was carried up the field and across the line a second time, within three minutes after the first touchdown was secured.

"Whoop! Hurrah! Look at that!"

"Another touchdown! Keep it up, fellows!"

"Oak Hall has struck her gait at last!"

And then the Oak Hall colors were waved wildly, while horns tooted and rattles were swung on every side. It was now Rockville's turn to remain silent.

"Be careful, fellows, don't get excited," warned Roger. "Watch your chances."

The goal was kicked, making the score, Rock-

ville 16, Oak Hall 12. There were but eight minutes more in which to play. Once again the leather came into the field. Rockville was now on guard against another mass play and it was decided to try the left end. The ball went to Ben, who passed it to Dave. Dave made a short run and doubled, as if turning back. Then he plunged forward, hurdled (it was the old style of playing), and tore up the field for twenty yards. Then he was brought to earth with a thud that made his ears ring and caused him to see stars.

"Are you hurt, Dave?" he heard Roger ask, and sitting up he shook his head. Time had been called, and he learned that for two minutes he had been dead to the world.

"I—I guess I am all right," he said, and with a mighty effort pulled himself together. "Did—did I gain anything?"

"Did you gain anything? Well, rather!" answered Phil. "It was a dandy play!"

Again the ball was put into play, and it went back and forth in a manner that was heartbreaking, first for one side and then for the other. Then came a warning cry:

"Three minutes more to play!"

It nerved all of the players up as never before and the struggle was the most bitter yet. But with less than a minute and a half to play Dave secured the ball and made a clever pass to Phil, who

started up the field. Babcock guarded him on one side and Roger on the other, and in a trice another sensational run was on.

"Down him! Down him!" was the frantic yell from Rockville, and just as Phil, panting for breath, reached the goal-line he was caught and thrown with tremendous violence, his head striking the ground with great force.

"Another touchdown!"

"Oak Hall wins the game!"

It was true, the touchdown had been made, fairly and squarely. With drooping hearts Rockville came out of the mix-up. There was nothing more to be done, for all but quarter of a minute of the time was up. Phil lay on the ball motionless, his face buried in the grass.

"He's hurt!" cried Dave, bending over his chum. "Phil!"

There was no answer, and now Roger and some others came to the aid of the fallen one. They turned Phil over. His face was pale and his eyes closed. He made not the slightest sound.

"Call the doctor!" said Dave, in as steady a voice as he could command. "I—I hope he isn't hurt very much."

Water was brought and Phil's face was bathed, but still he made no sound nor did he open his eyes. Then the doctor came up and took charge.

"He has received a severe shock," said the

physician, after an examination. "As yet I cannot tell how badly he is affected. His head is bleeding, and it is possible he may have fractured his skull. We had best remove him to the house."

A barn door was procured and a blanket thrown over it, and on this the hurt student was placed and six others carried him to the mansion. In the meantime there had been a great cheering over Oak Hall's victory, but this soon came to an end when it was known that Phil Lawrence had been seriously hurt.

"I hope his skull hasn't been fractured," said Dave. "He certainly came down hard. I heard the thump plainly."

"So did I," answered Babcock, and then he ran off to see how Henshaw was faring. He found the latter sitting up in an easy-chair, as pale as death itself.

"Won out, eh?" said Henshaw, weakly. "Good enough!"

"How do you feel now?" questioned Babcock.

"Oh, my stomach is better and the dizziness is gone. But I am as weak as a rag."

Through an attendant Henshaw had heard of the arrival of Dave and Babcock and of the progress of the great game. He was shocked to learn that Phil had been seriously hurt.

"This will put a damper on the celebration," said he, and he was right. Only a few cared to

celebrate with Phil, for all they knew, lying at death's door. The sufferer was still unconscious, and a messenger had been sent off for another physician who was also a surgeon.

"This takes the edge off the victory," said Dave. "I'd rather lose than have anybody seriously hurt."

"Morr, we are mighty sorry for this," said the captain of the Rockville eleven, coming up. "I am sure you know it wasn't done intentionally."

"I know that," answered Roger. "But the play was pretty rough, especially towards the end."

"It was a fair tackle," said the Rockville captain, and moved off.

Those from the military academy felt their defeat keenly. Just when they had thought victory certain all their hopes had been dashed to the ground. They had to admit that Oak Hall had played fairly from start to finish.

"Boys, you did splendidly," said Dr. Clay. "The one dark spot is the fact that Lawrence has been hurt. I sincerely trust it does not prove serious."

While the doctor was doing what he could for Phil, the two schools were entertained in royal style by Mr. Mongrace. But Dave and Roger could eat little, their thoughts being constantly with Phil. Three others who did not enjoy the feast were Plum, Poole, and Jasniff.

"Hang the luck, anyway!" growled the bully, as he and his cronies walked away from the table. "Jasniff, this is the worst yet."

"Who would have thought that they could pull themselves together like that," grumbled Jasniff. "Why, I never saw such work on any field. They went at the play like demons—nothing could stand before them."

"Yes, and Phil Lawrence got a broken head for his pains," said Poole, in a tone more of satisfaction than regret.

"I don't care a continental for Lawrence," pursued the bully of Oak Hall. "What I am thinking of is the money I have lost."

"And the money I've lost, too," added Poole.

"Well, we'll have to pocket our losses, that's all," answered Jasniff. "With Porter, Babcock, and Henshaw off the list I thought we'd make a sure thing of it—but we didn't, and there you are."

"I don't know what I am going to do about the money I put up," said Gus Plum.

"Write to your old man for some," suggested Jasniff. "Tell him you lost your money, but don't say how."

"He won't let me have any more just yet—said so in his last letter."

"How about you, Nat?"

"My old man won't give up a cent until next allowance day, and that's two weeks off. I'll have to live on air till then."

A little later Poole was called away by one of the students, and Gus Plum and Nick Jasniff were left to themselves. Plum was in a quandary, for he had borrowed from several parties and now did not know how to pay the amounts back. Jasniff noticed his uneasiness.

"Don't take the loss so hard, Gus," he said. "Let us go off and have a smoke—it will settle your nerves. If we were in town we might get a drink. But we can't get it around here."

"Let's go back to the Hall, I am sick of it here," answered the bully of the school; and a few minutes later he and Jasniff started off, leaving Poole behind, in the company of several girls who had driven in to witness the football match. Poole always dressed very fastidiously, and sought the company of the girls whenever the opportunity offered.

Halfway to Oak Hall, Plum and Jasniff determined to ride on their wheels to Hampton, a small village south of Oakdale. Here they put up at the tavern, and Jasniff spent his last twenty cents for some liquor. Then they sat down in the back room, to smoke cigarettes and talk over their future plans.

"It don't feel nice to be dead-broke," said

Jasniff. "Wouldn't you like to earn a little pile, Gus?"

"How?" questioned the bully eagerly.

"Oh,—I don't know exactly," drawled Jasniff, looking up at the ceiling. "But it might be done, you know."

"Well, I've got to get money somehow," answered Plum, desperately. "I am not going around without a cent in my pocket, and in debt, too."

"Will you stand by me if I show you a way to get a little pile?" asked Jasniff, lowering his voice.

"Yes, I will," answered Plum, boldly.

"All right, then; I'll let you know what I can do in a few days. I've got to consult somebody else first, though."

CHAPTER XVIII

A FUNNY INITIATION

THE celebration to follow the grand victory was a rather tame affair on account of the accident to Phil Lawrence. The ship-owner's son was a prime favorite with many of the Oak Hall students and they asked about him constantly.

"He cannot be moved at present," said the doctors. "He must remain here." And after that the sufferer was made as comfortable as possible in one of the spare chambers of the mansion. A telegram was at once sent to his parents, and they came on the following morning. Poor Phil was still unconscious but came to his senses that evening, and by the following day seemed a trifle improved.

"Oh, I do hope he gets over it entirely," said Dave to Roger. "It would be awful to think of his suffering all his life."

"That is true, Dave. I'd rather we hadn't played at all."

"And to think it came at the very end of the game," broke in Buster Beggs.

"It will stop football for this season," an-

nounced Sam Day, and he was right. Dr. Clay issued orders that very day that no more games should be played until it was certain that Phil was out of danger. Even as it was, a number of the students received word from their parents and guardians forbidding their playing any more.

Dave wrote to his uncle and to the others about the game, and received several letters in return, including one from Jessie Wadsworth which he kept to himself and prized very highly. In it the girl wrote that she was glad they had won and was sure Dave had done his full share to gain the victory, but she was sorry to learn Phil had been hurt and that Dave must be sure to keep out of harm.

"We cannot afford to have anything happen to you," wrote Jessie, "for we all think so much of you." And this made Dave's cheeks flush and his heart beat with keenest pleasure.

The letter from Dunston Porter was also interesting, but one paragraph made Dave's heart sink. In this Mr. Porter stated that as yet no word of any kind had been received about Dave's father and sister.

"It certainly is queer you don't hear from them," said Roger, when he learned of this. "If they are in Europe or in America at least one of your letters must have followed them up."

"It's a mystery to me," answered Dave, and heaved a long sigh. He was more than impatient

to meet his father and sister, and who can blame him?

The two bicycles belonging to Dave and Babcock had been brought in by a farmer of that vicinity, who had found them near the fallen tree. This man was rewarded for his trouble, and Dave, Roger, and Babcock went to the spot hoping to find some clew to the mystery. They saw that the tree was decayed near the roots but that it had undoubtedly been broken off by force.

"It was surely the work of some enemies," said Dave. "The question is, Who is guilty?"

"Perhaps we'll learn some day," answered the senator's son; and there, for the time being, the subject was dropped.

As my old readers know there was a secret society at Oak Hall known as the Gee Eyes, this mysterious appellation standing for the initials, G. I., which in their turn stood for the words, Guess It. This society had its officers and its secret password, and met "semi-occasionally or oftener" as the by-laws had it. It was gotten up mostly for fun,—the said fun being largely due to the initiation of new members. Dave had joined and so had his chums, and they had aided in initiating a number of others.

For various reasons Plum, Poole, and Jasniff were out of this society. When Jasniff had wanted to join—as a newcomer to the Hall—he

had been rejected with scant ceremony. This had angered him, and as a consequence he and his cronies, along with several other students, had organized a new society, called the D. D. A. Club, the initials standing for Dare Do Anything. This was supposed to meet once a month, and all sorts of inducements were offered to get the other students to join.

"I hear the Gee Eyes are going to meet soon," said Nat Poole, one day to his cronies. "Ain't it about time the D. D. A. met too?"

"Have you found a new member?" asked Jasniff.

"Frank Bond wants to join."

"Oh, he's only a little fellow," sneered Jasniff.

"Never mind, we can get some fun out of him," said Gus Plum. "I'd like something to do. Things are dead slow."

The Gee Eyes met the very next night, and hearing of this the D. D. A. Club did the same. A new student named Sultzer—a German boy—wanted to join the Gee Eyes, and Dave and Ben Basswood were appointed as a committee of two to make ready for the occasion.

"We'll have to give 'em something brand-new," said Ben.

"That will not be so easy—since we have tried nearly everything," answered Dave.

Carl was made to bow until his nose touched the floor.
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"They are building a new house over near the Grislow place. Can't we do something there?"

"Maybe we can," said Dave. "Let us look over the ground."

By the time the Gee Eyes met everything was in readiness, and Ben Basswood brought Carl Sultzer to the meeting, which was held in an old boat-house down the river. In the meantime the other members had attired themselves in cotton robes of red, with black hoods over their heads and a yellow tassel dangling over one ear. Some had wooden swords, one a wooden hammer, and others stuffed clubs.

As Carl Sultzer, a fat boy with a round, ruddy face, was thrust into the room, he was surrounded and all present began to chant:

"Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly duddy!
Here he comes so fat and ruddy!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dee!
Stranger, stranger! Bend your knee!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dud!
Do you want to join this club?
If you do, down to the ground,
Make to us a bow profound!"

As the chant went on Carl Sultzer was forced to his knees and was made to bow until his nose touched the floor.

"Vot is dis ding, annahow?" he asked, in a trembling voice. "Is dis der Chee Eyes Club, I ton't know?"

"This is the renowned Gee Eyes Club," came in a solemn tone.

"Wouldst thou join us, base stranger?" asked another voice.

"Yah, sure, I choin," answered Carl. "Put vot I got to to alretty?"

"Thou shalt soon see," was the answer. "Numbers Three and Six, blindfold him."

"Look here, I ton't like dis!" cried the German student, as a bag was thrown over his head and fastened around his neck. The bag had a hole in the back, so that he could get air. But he could not see a thing.

"It must be done," was the answer. "For particulars see Section 45, rule 917 of the by-laws. Are you ready to learn the by-laws?"

"Der py-laws? Vot I got to puy py der py-laws?" asked the German student, cautiously.

"You haven't got to buy anything. You must learn them."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," came in another voice. "A man once—— Oh, excuse me, I forgot!" And the story came to a sudden end, as the speaker received a whack over the ear from a stuffed club.

"I believe Shadow would want to tell a story if he was at a funeral," whispered one hooded figure to another.

"Lo! the march begins!" cried a loud voice, in

Carl Sultzer's ear. It made the German boy jump. Then he was caught by the arms and his hands were tied behind him. In this fashion he was marched from the old boat-house and in the direction of the new building previously mentioned.

"Vere you been daking me?" asked Carl.

"Wait, and thou shalt see."

"How I vos going to see of I got mine eyes blindfolded alretty?"

To this there was no answer, but several of the hooded figures snickered.

The new building reached, several of the boys caught up the German lad in a blanket.

"Vot is dis now?" he asked, in fresh alarm.

"Be careful now while you carry him to the top of the building," whispered one boy, but loud enough for the German lad to hear.

"Hi! vot is dis, annahow?" yelled Carl.

"A new house they are building. We are going to take you to the top," answered a member of the secret society.

"Maype I ton't vos vant to go py der dop alretty," pleaded Carl.

"It won't hurt you. Come on, fellows!"

In a twinkling the German youth was lifted up and carried along, over some wooden horses and lumber piles. He thought he was going up—he knew not where.

"Hi! ton't you trop me town," he wailed.

"No, Carl dear, we'll drop you up," came in a cheery voice, and this brought forth another snicker.

Presently the boys came to a halt, and the victim was placed on his feet on a narrow board.

"Don't lose your balance," said one boy, cautiously.

"It's about thirty feet to the ground," added another.

"Oh, my! I ton't vos vant to dumble, ain't it!" shrieked Carl, in terror.

"You won't if you are careful. Now you must walk over the beams from one end of this building to the other."

"I can't vos do dot! I vos dumble town sure!" wailed Carl.

"You have got to do it if you want to join this society. Here, let me place your foot on the next beam," and Carl's right foot was caught up and put on a beam a foot and a half in front of that upon which he had been standing.

"Look out! I vos dumble me town!" he shrieked.

"Steady now and you'll be all right," was the answer. "Forward you go!"

But poor Carl did not go forward, instead he remained standing on the two beams, his knees shaking visibly.

"Forward!" was the cry again, and now he was

tapped on the back with the wooden swords and stuffed clubs.

"I dumble me town! I dumble me town sure as I vas porn!" he shrieked. "Ton't douch me!"

"Then move on. We won't let you fall," said one student, and still trembling the German lad started to walk across the beams to the other end of the building, as he thought. He passed over seven beams when, of a sudden, one fell over. Down he went, yelling wildly and clutching at the beam he had just left. Then he struck the ground, which was just under the beams, and rolled over. In another moment the sack was taken from his head and his hands were unloosened.

"Vell, I neffer!" he ejaculated, gazing around in a sheepish way. "I dink me sure I vos der top of der puilding on alretty! Und I vos on der groundt all der vile! Now ain't dot funny!" And all at once he set up a roar of laughter. The other students joined in, and the general merriment lasted for fully five minutes.

"Now, Carl, you are a full-fledged member of the Gee Eyes," said Dave, coming forward. "Let me congratulate you." And he gave Carl's hand a tight squeeze.

"Dank you," said the German lad. Then the others shook hands, each giving Carl's hand the tightest squeeze possible. Soon the youth began to dance around.

"Hi! somepody stop dot!" he roared. "I ton't vont mine hand squashed to a jelly alretty! Let go, I told you!" And after that he would do no more handshaking.

It was rather cold and soon one of the students suggested that they go back to the Hall. But the others demurred.

"Let us take a trolley ride," said one. "Just the thing in this moonlight. We can get back in plenty of time."

So it was agreed, and off the crowd set, in the direction of the trolley line, upon which they had had so much sport the previous summer. Nobody dreamed of the surprise in store for them.

CHAPTER XIX

ALMOST SCARED TO DEATH

WHILE the Gee Eyes were having their sport with Carl Sultzer quite another scene was being enacted some distance away, in the vicinity of the trolley tracks.

Little Frank Bond, a pale and highly sensitive youth who had come to Oak Hall two weeks before, was being initiated into the mysteries of the D. D. A. Club by Plum, Poole, Jasniff, and several of their cronies.

Frank did not care for clubs, being a lad of a retiring disposition. But he had been "talked into it" by Plum, who thought he saw some keen sport in scaring the little fellow half to death.

"You must join by all means," said the bully of the school. "Why, life at Oak Hall won't be worth living unless you're a member of the D. D. A. Club." And very foolishly Frank agreed to submit to an initiation.

"We'll scare him out of his seven senses," chuckled Plum. "It will be a barrel of fun."

"What will you do?" questioned the others of the club.

When the bully of Oak Hall unfolded his plan several demurred, stating it would be rather severe on a lad of Frank's temperament. But they were overruled, and in the end the so-styled initiation was carried out as the bully planned it.

After a good deal of ceremony, which was great fun and rather enjoyed by the small boy, Frank was blindfolded and marched out in the direction of the trolley tracks. The club members took to a side road, where there was a single track running to a town several miles distant. On this track was a new turnout, which had been put down only a short while before.

"Where are we going?" asked Frank, timidly, as the others hurried him along.

"To the trolley tracks," was the answer. "We want to test your nerve."

"How?"

"Oh, we'll put you on the tracks and let the trolley run over you," answered Plum, brutally.

"Oh, please don't put me on the tracks!" cried Frank. "I—I know you don't want to hurt me, but a trolley car might come along, and I might get struck."

"Oh, it's all right," said Jasniff. "If you're ground up we'll pick up the pieces and give you a decent burial."

This sort of talk was kept up until the trolley line was reached, and the effect was to completely unnerve the young victim. He was allowed to see the single track and then blindfolded once more, and his hands were tied behind his back.

"Now put him on the tracks," commanded Plum, roughly.

"And don't forget to chain him fast," added Jasniff, rattling a dog chain he had brought along.

"Oh, we'll chain him good and hard," said Nat Poole.

"No! no! Please don't!" cried Frank, and now he tried to break away from his tormentors. A struggle ensued, but in the end he was subdued and dragged along the track to where was located the turnout just mentioned. Here he was thrown on his back, and his hands were fastened down to one of the rails.

"Don't! Let me go! Please let me go!" he shrieked. "I don't want to be tied to the track! I don't want to join the club! If a trolley should come along I'd surely be hurt! Let me go!" And he started to struggle again.

"See here, aren't we going a little too far?" whispered one of the students.

"He's too sensitive for this sort of sport," added another.

"Oh, pshaw! it's all right," interrupted Plum. "The little beggar won't be hurt in the least."

"But he'll be scared to death."

"Well, that's the fun of it," came from Jasniff.

In the meantime Frank Bond continued to cry out to be released. He was so frightened now that he know not what to do. He struggled madly to break his bonds.

"I'm going to let him go," began one boy, a lad named Messmer.

"Don't you touch him," answered Plum, roughly. "It's only fun."

"But, Gus——"

"Here comes the trolley!" shouted Jasniff. "Now, Bond, take it easy when they run over you!"

"Don't throw the trolley off the track," added Plum, brutally.

The trolley came along swiftly in the semi-darkness, and as it approached Frank Bond let out a piercing scream for help. He was now completely beside himself with fear.

"Don't, don't! Help!" he screamed. "Save me! Save me!" And then he began to foam at the mouth.

With a rush and a roar the trolley car came on. The poor boy on the turnout track thought sure it was going to run over him and struggled madly to get free. Then, just as the trolley swept beside him, he broke his bonds, leaped to his feet, and stepped blindly toward the car. His arm struck

the back platform and he was hurled backward. Then the trolley, with its gleaming headlight, swept on its way, the motorman taking no notice of what had happened.

"He's hurt!" was the cry from Messmer.

"It's the little beggar's own fault," said Gus Plum, but his voice trembled as he spoke.

"Oh, I am killed! I am killed!" cried Frank, struggling to his feet and throwing the bandage from his eyes. He was foaming at the mouth, and bleeding both at the head and on the hand. "Don't let the trolley go over me again! Save me! Save me!" And then, with a bound, he turned and disappeared into the bushes and trees which lined the trolley road at this point.

"He has gone mad!" whispered one of the boys, hoarsely.

"As mad as a March hare," was the comment of another of the students. "Come back, Frank! It's all right!" he called out.

"The little fool!" muttered Jasniff. "He wouldn't have been hurt at all if he had remained quiet." He raised his voice: "Come back here, Bond, it's all over!"

"I said he couldn't stand it," said Messmer. "It was a shame to go so far."

"Oh, don't preach to me," returned Jasniff. "Bond, are you coming back?" he cried, in a louder tone.

The only reply was a distant scream, so cold and uncanny it made all of the students shiver. Then came other screams, gradually growing fainter and fainter.

"He is going deeper and deeper into the woods!"

"Say, we'll have to get him out of that!"

"He has gone crazy, just as sure as fate," said Messmer. "Come, we must bring him back and do what we can for him."

The wood was a long one and some distance from the trolley turnout was another road, leading down to the main line. Dave and his chums were coming along this road when Ben came to a sudden halt.

"Listen!"

"What did you hear, Ben?"

Before Ben could answer Dave's question a blood-curdling scream rent the air. It was followed by another and then another.

"My gracious! is that a ghost?" queried Sam Day.

"It's somebody in trouble perhaps," came from Roger.

"Of dot peen a ghost I dink I go me pack to der Hall alretty now!" said Carl Sultzer, in alarm.

"There are no ghosts," said Dave. "All so-called ghosts are make-believes—humbugs, in fact."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow, as the crowd came to a halt, listening to a repetition of the cries. "A lot of college students wanted to play a joke on their professor, so they put together the body of one bug, the wings of another, the legs of another, and the horns of another. Then they went to the old professor and said: 'Here is a wonderful new bug we have found. What family does it belong to?' The old professor looked the thing over for a minute. 'A well-known family,' he said. 'A very large family.' 'What?' asked the students, all ready to laugh at the old fellow. 'The family of humbugs,' answered the professor."

"That's all right," said Roger, laughing, while the others joined in.

"Say, vot has dot hum-pug to to mit dot ghost?" asked Carl, innocently. He had been the only one unable to appreciate the joke.

"Nothing, but—listen!"

Buster Beggs broke off short, as another scream rent the air. Then the members of the Gee Eyes saw a wild-looking youth rush across the road and disappear among the trees beyond.

"Did you see that?"

"It was a boy!"

"He acted as if he was crazy!"

"Yes, and do you know who it was?" demanded Dave. "It was little Frank Bond!"

"So it was," added Roger. "Boys, what can this mean?"

"He must be in trouble," said Buster Beggs.

"Perhaps some wild animal scared him," was Ben's comment. "But what can he be doing out here alone this time of night?"

"Bond! Bond!" cried Roger. "Come back here! What's the matter?"

But the only answer that came back was another scream, as the half-crazed lad plunged deeper and deeper into the wood. Soon he was completely out of hearing.

"I don't like this," was Dave's comment.

"Listen, I hear somebody else coming," said Ben, and soon they heard Plum and his crowd approaching through the woods. They were hunting in several directions for Frank Bond.

"Hullo!" cried Roger to the other crowd, and soon the D. D. A. members and the Gee Eyes confronted each other.

"What brings you out here?" demanded Plum, suspiciously.

"We might ask the same question of you?" returned Dave, coldly.

"Oh, I say, Porter, have you seen anything of little Frank Bond?" asked Messmer, stepping forward.

"Yes, we saw him a minute ago. He ran across this road as if he was crazy. What's the trouble?"

"Don't say a word!" burst out Jasniff, confronting his fellow club member.

"Bond got scared and ran away from us," went on Messmer, ignoring Nick Jasniff completely. "Did he—er—did he look hurt, or—er—crazy?"

"He looked both," put in Roger. "What have you been doing, hazing him?"

"That's our affair," broke in Plum, warningly.

"Look here, Plum, and you too, Jasniff, I won't stand for any more of your talk!" cried Messmer, wrathfully. "You went too far, and I said so from the start." He turned again to Dave and Roger. "We were initiating Bond into our club. We had him down to the trolley track and—well, he got badly scared and bumped into a trolley that was passing. Then all at once he seemed to go crazy and ran off into the woods. We don't know how badly he is hurt or where he has gone to."

"If that's the case, one thing is certain," said Dave. "We must find him, and do it as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XX

A STUDENT'S STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

MUCH against the wishes of Plum, Poole, and Jasniff, Messmer told many of the details of what had been done to poor Frank Bond. He did not attempt to shield himself. His story was corroborated by a student named Jardell, who was disgusted by the attitude taken by the bully of Oak Hall and his intimates.

"I like fun as well as the next one," said Jardell, "but I don't want to see it carried too far."

"Oh, you needn't blame us for everything," sneered Plum. "You're tarred with the same brush."

"There is no use in discussing the matter now," said Dave. "What we want to do is to find poor Frank. Why, he may be seriously hurt!"

"I trust not," answered Messmer, turning pale.

The students walked into the wood and a search was begun that lasted the best part of an hour. Nobody got on the trail of the missing boy and no more cries were heard. It was so dark that but little could be seen, and at last the whole crowd came out on the road again.

The thoughts of a trolley ride had been abandoned by the members of the Gee Eyes, and they decided to get back to the Hall as soon as possible.

"But Dr. Clay ought to be told about Frank," said Dave, to Messmer and Jardell.

"I'll tell him," answered Messmer, promptly. "I'll tell him the truth, even if I'm dismissed from the school for it."

"So will I," added Jardell.

"Going to get us into trouble, eh?" growled Gus Plum. "Better go slow."

"I'll not mention any names," said Messmer.

"Neither will I," added Jardell. "I am not that kind."

Presently all of the students returned to Oak Hall by the shortest possible route. The Gee Eyes went in a crowd by themselves, and because of an open back door had small difficulty in entering without being noticed. A little later Plum and his cronies came in, followed by Messmer and Jardell.

"Do you think Messmer and Jardell will really go to the doctor?" questioned Sam Day.

"I do," answered Dave. "They are good, honest fellows, both of them. After this I reckon they'll give Plum and his crowd the go-by." And in that surmise Dave was correct.

The boys listened in the upper hallway, and soon

heard Messmer and Jardell enter the Hall. The two held a whispered talk for a minute and then walked boldly to Dr. Clay's room and rapped on the door.

"They are certainly going to face the music," whispered Roger.

"I admire their grit," was Ben's comment.

The knock on the doctor's door was answered by a voice from within, and presently Dr. Clay appeared, clad in his dressing-gown. Then the owner of the Hall and the two students went down to the office.

Exactly all that passed between the doctor and Messmer and Jardell was never known to the school at large. But it was known that the boys told a straight story and utterly refused to mention any names but their own and poor Frank Bond's. As soon as the meeting in the office was over Dr. Clay summoned Jackson Lemond and Swingly the janitor, and all three went out, taking Messmer and Jardell with them.

"They have gone on a hunt," said Dave. "Oh, I do hope they find that poor lad!"

It goes without saying that some of the students did not sleep well that night. Plum, Poole, and Jasniff were particularly restless, fearing they would be called to the bar of justice. They were sure Messmer and Jardell would "blab" on them, as the bully expressed it.

"But if they do, I'll hammer the life out of them," said the bully.

"And so will I," added Jasniff.

In the morning it was easy to see that something was wrong. The teachers and hired help went around whispering to themselves, and there was a good deal of quiet talking among the boys. It was soon learned that Frank Bond was still missing and nobody knew what had become of him.

As soon as the school was assembled Dr. Clay addressed the students.

"Young gentlemen, a most deplorable thing occurred last night," he began. "One of the younger students was taken out and 'initiated,' as it is called, into one of your secret societies. The strain was too great on his nerves, and after being hurt by a trolley car, he became half-crazy and disappeared into the North End woods. Two students have already told me about the affair. I want to know the names of the others connected with this occurrence. Anybody who had anything to do with it, stand up."

There was a full minute of silence and the students looked keenly at one another.

"Does anybody in this assembly room know anything about this at all?" went on the master of Oak Hall. "Remember, young gentlemen, it is a serious matter, and I want to learn all there is to know of it."

As the doctor ceased speaking Dave arose in his seat. He was promptly followed by Roger, Ben, and half a dozen others of the Gee Eyes. The other students looked at those who had arisen in astonishment, while Plum, Poole, and Jasniff were dumfounded.

"Is he going to blab too?" whispered Jasniff to Plum, indicating Dave.

"Looks like it."

"Porter, what have you to say?" questioned Dr. Clay.

"Not a great deal, sir, but I am willing to tell what I can. I had nothing to do with the hazing, or whatever you may call it. But I was out near the woods last night and I saw Frank Bond run across the road and plunge into the woods at the North End. A whole crowd of us searched for him, but we could not find him."

"And what have you to say, Morr?"

"I was with Dave Porter, sir," answered the senator's son.

"So was I," "And I," came from the others of the Gee Eyes.

"You had nothing to do with Frank Bond previous to his becoming frightened and running away?" demanded the master of the Hall, sharply.

"No, sir, I was not near him, nor were any of my companions," answered Dave, indicating his friends.

"Then you were not with Messmer and Jardell?"

"Not until after we met on the road and started to hunt for Bond, sir."

"We were with an entirely different party, Dr. Clay," said Messmer, rising in his seat.

"The party that 'initiated' Bond, is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are those students in this room?"

Messmer remained silent.

"Messmer, answer me."

"Dr. Clay, they are in this room, but I—I cannot tell you who they are."

"Porter, what have you to say?"

There was a moment of breathless silence.

"Dr. Clay, I would rather you would not ask me to mention any names," said Dave, slowly but firmly. "I think every fellow ought to speak up for himself. He will if he has any honor about him."

"Then you decline to speak?"

"I am very sorry to say that I do, sir."

There was another pause, and then a rather stupid boy arose and began to shuffle his feet uneasily.

"What is it, Seabold?" asked the doctor.

"I ain't going to hang back no longer, Dr. Clay," stammered Seabold. "I was in that—er—that mix-up with Messmer and Jardell. Porter

and Morr and that crowd didn't have anything to do with it. I don't like to be a sneak, but I can't stand up for such a sneak as Gus Plum, nor Nat Poole, nor Nick Jasniff neither. We were all in it together, and as Porter says, they ought to have honor enough to speak up and take their share of the blame. We didn't mean to hurt Frank Bond, only to scare him. When he ran away I got scared myself and so did the others. We began to hunt for Frank, and then Porter and his crowd came along and helped us. But it was no use, we couldn't find the boy. I ain't slept all night thinking of Frank. I'd give all I'm worth to find him."

"Who got up the plan to tie Bond to the trolley track?"

"Gus Plum spoke of it first."

"It ain't so!" yelled Gus Plum, leaping up, his face very red. "I didn't have anything more to do with it than anybody else."

"He spoke of it to me," added Seabold.

"Poole, what have you to say?"

"I—er—I didn't have hardly anything to do with it," said Nat, lamely, his knees shaking beneath him. "I—er—looked on—mostly."

"Jasniff, did you propose the plan?"

"No, sir," answered Jasniff, boldly. "I reckon Messmer and Jardell and Seabold hatched it up between them."

"So they did," put in Plum, maliciously.

"That is positively false," declared Messmer. "As a matter of fact I said I didn't want to go so far, because Frank seemed to be so frightened. If I had had my own way I should have released him long before the trolley car came along. He was too nervous to stand such fun."

"If the truth is to come out, Gus Plum is the one who proposed tying Bond to the trolley track," said Jardell. "I wasn't going to say a word, but I am not going to stand here and let him throw the blame on Messmer and me, or on Porter and his crowd, or anybody else. I have told the exact truth so far as I am concerned, and I am ready to take any punishment that is coming to me."

After this a long talk followed, and in the end the master of the Hall said he would take up the matter later, when it was learned what had become of Frank Bond. In the meantime, so great was the excitement, the school was dismissed for the day, and those who wished to do so were told that they might go out until sundown in a search for the missing pupil.

"I am certainly going out," said Dave, to Roger and Ben. "I think we ought to do our best to find him, or else find out about him."

"Maybe he jumped into the river and drowned himself," suggested Ben.

"Or fell over some cliff and got killed," added the senator's son. "A fellow so scared as he was

might do almost anything. But I agree with Dave, we ought to go out."

The matter was talked over, and in the end Dave, Ben, Roger, and Beggs set off in a little party, taking a lunch with them. In the meantime others went out too, so that the woods known as the North End were alive with boys and men, all searching for the missing student.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CAVERN IN THE WOODS

THE four students remembered the part of the big woods which had been gone over before and consequently they did not attempt to search for Frank Bond in that direction. They struck out over a small hill and then along somewhat of a hollow, though which ran a small creek that flowed into the Leming River.

The way was rough and uncertain, and several times they had fairly to force their progress through the bushes. Once Buster Beggs got caught so thoroughly that the others had to turn back to aid him.

"Do you think Frank could have come in this direction?" questioned Roger. "How could he get through?"

"A fellow who is half crazy will do all sorts of queer things," answered Dave. "And as we couldn't find him in the other part of the woods, it appears to me as if he must have come this way."

Over an hour was spent in searching along the creek, but without avail. They called Frank's

name a great number of times, but not a sound came back save the call of the birds.

"I shouldn't like to run across any snakes," said Buster Beggs.

"I don't believe there are any very bad snakes in this woods," answered Ben.

They now made another turn and came up to the face of a rocky cliff. Suddenly Dave leaped forward.

"Look! look!" he cried, and held up a handkerchief covered with blood. In one corner were the initials, F. A. B.

"Frank A. Bond," said Roger. "We must be on the right track."

"Oh, if only we don't find the poor fellow dead!" murmured Dave.

Further on the rocks were very rough, and then came a cleft leading into a small cavern. The entrance was dark and partly covered with brush.

"See, the bushes are torn and broken," was Ben's comment. "Somebody has been walking in and out."

They gazed into the cavern, but for a few seconds could see nothing.

"Frank!" called out Dave. "Frank Bond!"

"Help!" came back, in a faint voice. "Help me!"

"He is here!" exclaimed Dave. "Has anybody a match so we can make a light?"

Buster Briggs had some matches, which he used for his bicycle lamp, and with one of these the four boys set fire to some dry brushwood they pulled up. The glare from the flames lit up the interior of the cavern, and they gazed inside, to behold poor Frank Bond lying in a corner on some leaves. The young student was utterly exhausted and lay with his eyes closed.

"Frank, are you hurt?" asked Dave, bending over him. "I mean, are you hurt very badly?"

At the sound of Dave's voice the youth on the leaves opened his eyes for a moment.

"Take me back to school!" he gasped. "Don't —don't let the trolley run over me!"

"Frank, you are safe now—nothing is going to hurt you," said the senator's son. "Tell us where you are hurt."

"I—I——" Frank Bond stared around him. "I thought it was the Plum crowd after me! Whe—where did you come from?"

"From the school. We came out to look for you."

"Oh!"

"What about your hurts?" asked Ben.

"Oh, I got my arm hurt, and my leg, and I fell down and cut my face," answered the sufferer. "I—I don't know how I got here, and I didn't know the way home, and I got hungry and sleepy,

and—and——" Frank Bond could not go on, but burst into tears.

"We'll fix you up," said Dave, kindly. "We've brought some lunch with us and you shall have all you want. Start up that fire briskly, fellows."

The fire was built up in good shape, and two torches were brought into the cavern. Then Frank Bond was propped up against a wall and given something to eat and to drink. He was very hungry and ate up fully half of what the four boys carried. Water was then brought in from the creek and his several wounds were washed and dressed. Fortunately none of them was serious, although they had been very painful.

The small student was still in a highly nervous state and the others did all they could to quiet him. He remembered being tied to the trolley track and running away, but could not tell how he had reached the cavern or how long he had remained there.

"I guess I was plumb crazy," he declared. "I thought sure the trolley car was going to run over me!"

At last the others managed to get him to his feet. But he was too weak to walk more than a few steps at a time.

"I—I can't do it," he gasped. "Oh, how will I ever get back to the Hall?"

"Let us take turns at carrying him," suggested

Dave. "Frank, you can hold on to my back, can't you?"

The small student said he would try, and putting out the fire the whole party quitted the cavern, the hurt lad on Dave's back. It was quite a load for Dave to master, but he managed it for several hundred yards, when each of the others took a turn. Thus, after hard work, they got Frank to the roadway.

A loud yelling brought some other boys and Andrew Dale to the scene. One of the boys had his wheel and, riding on this, he went back to the academy and had Jackson Lemond come for Frank with a carriage. Then a pistol was fired off three times,—this being the signal showing that the missing one was found. Soon pupils and teachers came trooping back to Oak Hall, all anxious to listen to Frank's story.

As soon as he arrived at the Hall, the small student was taken to a private bedroom and a doctor was sent for to attend him. In the meantime he was given something hot to drink and rolled in blankets, that he might not take cold. Not until that evening did Dr. Clay attempt to get the details of his story from the sufferer.

When the physician arrived he said that Frank's hurts were not of a serious nature. "He has been more frightened than anything else," said the doctor. "He must be kept very quiet for at least a

week, and after that, Dr. Clay, you had better let him go slowly with his studies for a month or so."

"I'll do it," answered the master of Oak Hall.

"This lad is of a high-strung temperament and he has been under an unusual mental strain."

"You do not think he will suffer permanently?" asked the good doctor, anxiously.

"Oh, no, but he must be kept quiet."

In an easy kind of way Dr. Clay drew from Frank Bond his whole story of the initiation into the D. D. A. Club. From the lad he learned that Plum and Jasniff had been the prime movers in the so-called fun, and that Poole had backed them up. He at once sent for the three to come to his private office.

"I reckon we're in for it now," growled Plum, on receiving the summons.

"Deny everything," advised Nick Jasniff. He thought nothing of telling a falsehood whenever it suited him.

When the three entered the office Dr. Clay faced them sternly.

"I want to have a talk to you three young gentlemen," said the master of Oak Hall. "I have learned the truth of the Frank Bond affair and I want to know what you mean by such conduct."

The three tried to excuse themselves, but it was to no purpose. The doctor read them through

and through, and then gave each a lecture that was never forgotten.

"Fun is fun, but this was not fun," said he. "Bond is a delicate and highly nervous boy, and to do what you did was to make him suffer most horribly. It is a wonder that you did not drive him insane. As it is, he will suffer for a long time to come, and if his parents see fit to prosecute you it will be your own fault if you are sent to jail. More than that, you have disgraced this school, and for that I intend to punish you myself. Each of you must remain inside of the academy grounds for the next two weeks, and in addition I will give you some extra lessons in history to learn, and I want them learned thoroughly. And more than this, if you are ever concerned in such a disgraceful proceeding again I shall dismiss you from Oak Hall."

When the three students left the doctor's office Nat Poole was so cowed that he trembled in every limb. Plum, too, was subdued, but Jasniff was boiling with inward rage.

"I didn't come here to be bulldozed," he declared. "If I want some fun I am going to have it. If old Clay sends me away, I guess I'll find some other school just as good." Jasniff was certainly a bad youth, but the others were still to find out how really bad he was.

After this a week slipped by rather quickly.

During that time Dave got word from the Lawrences that Phil was a trifle better physically, but that his head hurt him a great deal. He was still in bed and there was no telling when he would get around again.

"I trust it doesn't hurt his head permanently," said Dave, for at least the fiftieth time. He had heard of a boy who had had his head hurt by a water-wheel and had become silly in consequence.

"Let us hope for the best," answered Roger. "Poor Phil! It would certainly be awful if he didn't get around all right again!"

The injuries received by Phil and Frank Bond put something of a damper on the school and for some time matters ran along very quietly. Plum was troubled in more ways than one. He was afraid he was going to hear from Frank Bond's father or the police, and he was also worrying over his football wagers. He had lost all his spending money and he owed about thirty dollars, and his friends were pressing him to pay up. He had gone to Poole for a loan, but Nat had all he could do to pay his own losses. Jasniff had promised to do something, but since the Bond affair had said nothing more on the subject.

"Say, Nick, I thought you were going to help me get some money," said he one day to his crony, when he could keep silent no longer.

"Haven't you got some money from home?" asked the other boy, with a leer.

"No, my dad can't spare any just now," answered the bully, bluntly. He was growing desperate. His father had written that he must get along without spending money for at least a month more.

"Well, I'll let you know what I can do in a week or so," answered Jasniff, slowly.

"You said that before—right after the football game."

"Well, I haven't been able to see those fellows yet."

"What fellows?"

"Those I want to talk to."

"Can't you hurry it up, Nick? I want some money the worst way—ten or fifteen dollars at least."

The two were alone, down at the old boathouse, and Jasniff was smoking a cigarette on the sly. He blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling.

"Wonder if I can trust you to keep mum?" he said, slowly and deliberately.

"About what?"

"About a little plan I've got to make some money."

"Haven't you always been able to trust me, Nick?"

"Certainly, but—this is out of the ordinary."

"I never went back on you yet."

"Will you promise to keep silent if I tell you something?"

"Yes."

"I've got a scheme to get hold of several hundred dollars."

"That's good."

"It will take some—er—quiet work on the part of both of us to do the trick."

"Well, as I said before, I am with you."

"Can I trust you absolutely?" demanded Jasniff, looking Plum closely in the face.

"You can."

"Then take a walk and we'll talk the matter over. But remember, if you say a word to anybody about it—well, you had better not, that's all!"

They walked to a secluded spot and there, slowly and cautiously, Nick Jasniff unfolded a plot to get money which filled Gus Plum with curiosity, fear, wonder, and fascination.

CHAPTER XXII

A BOY AND A MOTOR CYCLE

WITH all the excitement Dave had not forgotten his studies and each day he spent all the time that was necessary in preparing his lessons. He had a faculty of concentrating his mind upon what he was doing and this made learning easy.

"Going in for the medal of honor, I suppose," said Roger one day, as he observed Dave grinding away at a Latin exercise. "Well, if you win it I guess you'll deserve it."

"I am going to do what I can, Roger. I didn't come to Oak Hall just to cut up."

The medal of honor had been promised by Dr. Clay to the pupil who should stand highest in lessons and deportment at the end of the term. It was a beautiful medal of solid gold, and many students secretly hoped to win it. So far Polly Vane was in the lead, with Dave, Buster Beggs, Sam Day, Roger, and a student named Langdale close behind.

"Langdale says he is going to win or die in the attempt," went on the senator's son. "He is

studying day and night, and so far his deportment has been about perfect."

"Well, mine hasn't been—at least, not according to Job Haskers," answered Dave. "He marks me down whenever he can."

"He does that to all of us," said Sam Day, who was near. "I wish he'd mark us up once."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow Hamilton, who was resting on the end of a bed. "A clothing dealer was going to have a fire sale. So he lit some damp paper in his stove and turned off the draught, so that his stock got all smoked up. Then he called his son Moses up. 'Make out new brice tickets,' says he to Moses. 'All right, fader,' says Moses, and goes to work, and the next day he put out suits of clothing labeled like this: 'Great Fire Sale! Suits marked down from $9.00 to $7.98.' Soon a man came along to buy a suit. 'Why,' says he, 'that suit was only $5.50 two days ago.' 'Yes,' says Moses. 'Vos it? Vell, ve haf der fire since, and now der suits vos all moth-broof!' "

"Phew! that's enough to drive all the lessons from a fellow's head!" cried Dave, after a short laugh. "Where did you get it, Shadow?"

"Maybe he picked it out of the Old Farmers' Almanack," said Buster Beggs.

"Which puts me in mind," began Shadow calmly. "A boy——"

"Not to-day!" interrupted Roger. "That's the fiftieth you've told this week. I'm going out for a spin, boys."

"Going to try that new motor cycle?" queried Dave, looking up.

"Yes."

"Well, don't let it run away with you," and Dave smiled broadly.

"No fear," said Roger, with a laugh, and left the dormitory.

The senator's son had received a new motor cycle the day before. It was a beautiful nickel-plated affair and Roger was very proud of it. He knew a little about motor cycles, so it did not take him long to get the machine in trim for use. He took a spin up and down the road, and let Dave and some others try it, and all pronounced it a beauty.

Roger was soon on the motor cycle and speeding in the direction of Oakdale. In the town he made a few small purchases, and then came away for a spin in the direction of Rockville, taking a side road which he thought in better condition than the main road.

The senator's son had covered a mile when he saw two boys on bicycles approaching him. He reduced his speed, and as the pair came closer he recognized Plum and Jasniff.

"Got your motor out, eh?" said the bully of Oak Hall, rather sourly.

"Yes," returned Roger, briefly.

"Can you get it to work?"

"The machine works perfectly."

"I'd rather have my bicycle," sneered Jasniff. "That thing makes too much noise for me."

"So would I," added Gus Plum. "Too much noise and too much smell."

"I'd rather have the motor cycle, so there you are," answered the senator's son, and moved on again, while the others did the same. "I guess it's a case of sour grapes," he told himself.

Roger had just passed a bend of the road when something happened to the battery which supplied the electric spark to ignite the gasoline. He set the motor cycle against a rock, and it was a full quarter of an hour before he could make the battery work. During that time somebody came through the bushes near him and looked at the youth, but Roger took no notice.

The motor cycle ready for use once more, the senator's son hopped on the saddle and turned on the power. All seemed to go well and presently, to make up for lost time, he put on all speed.

"It won't do to be late for supper," he reasoned. "Haskers will catch me sure."

He passed another turn, between some high bushes. The way was now downhill, leading over a small stream flowing into the Leming River. The motor cycle took the down-grade at a rapid

rate of speed, and fearing an accident, Roger attempted to turn off the power and put on the brake.

To his horror he could not move the power lever, which had become caught in some manner. The motor cycle was now bounding down the road at a terrific rate of speed. Just ahead was the little bridge. Roger gave a vain tug or two. Then the machine struck the rough boards of the bridge, made a turn against the stone wall, and heels over head the senator's son went sailing over the stone wall to the rocks and water below!

It was a terrible fall, much worse than that experienced by Dave and Babcock when they had run into the fallen tree, and no sooner did Roger land than his senses forsook him. His legs and part of his body went into the water, while his head and arms rested on some sand.

The short autumn day drew to a close and Roger did not appear at Oak Hall. The other students went to supper and then for the first Dave learned that the senator's son had not gotten back.

"Where is Master Morr?" demanded Job Haskers, severely.

"He went out on his new motor cycle," answered Dave. "Perhaps he had a breakdown."

"If he was not sure he could get back in time he should not have gone out," snapped the disagreeable teacher.

Supper over, some of the students retired to

their dormitories while others sought the library and the gymnasium. Dave and Ben looked around for Roger, but as he did not put in an appearance they obtained permission from Andrew Dale to go out on their bicycles and make a hunt for the missing one.

"He must be somewhere in this vicinity," said Dave.

"He said he was going to Oakdale and would then come back by the Cass Brook road," returned Ben.

"Let us take to the Cass Brook road then, Ben. Maybe we'll meet him."

With their bicycle lamps lit and turned up brightly, the pair set off, and were soon out of sight of Oak Hall. The road was smooth and they made rapid progress. Ben took to one side of the road while Dave pursued the other. All was dark and quiet, not a breath of air stirring the almost leafless trees.

A mile covered, they slowed down, to peer into the bushes beside the road. They were now within half a mile of the bridge where Roger had taken the tumble.

"Hello! here comes somebody!" cried Dave, presently, and looked ahead. The rays of the bicycle lamp fell on a figure covered with dirt and dripping wet. "I declare, it's Roger!"

Dave had scarcely uttered the words when the

figure tottered and fell. Riding up, the two boys dismounted and rushed forward. Roger lay in the middle of the road, his face resting on one arm.

"Roger what is it?" asked Dave. "Are you badly hurt?"

"I—I took a header—over the bridge!" gasped the senator's son, when he could speak. "I—fell in th—the water!" His teeth began to chatter. "My, but it was co—co—cold!"

"Any bones broken?"

"I—I reckon no—not. But I am awfully we—weak!"

"Where is the motor cycle?" asked Ben.

"I—I do—don't know."

"Here, put on my sweater," said Dave, and hastened to take off that which was wet. "We must get him to the Hall somehow," he added.

"If he isn't hurt he had better walk," returned Ben. "It will help to get his blood in circulation."

"Maybe I can walk if you'll help me," answered Roger.

The two bicycles were hidden in the bushes and Dave got on one side of the senator's son and Ben on the other. Thus supported, the sufferer started again for Oak Hall. He was hurried along as fast as possible, and arrived there feeling somewhat warmer than when discovered by Dave and Ben. Under Dr. Clay's directions he was put to bed and given some hot tea to drink. Only his

left hand was bruised and this was washed and plastered up.

Having gotten Roger to Oak Hall, Dave and Ben received permission to go back to the brook road for their wheels. They found the bicycles where they had left them, and then went on a hunt for Roger's motor cycle.

"It certainly ought to be at the bridge," said Ben.

"If it didn't blow up," answered Dave, "or run off of its own accord. Roger said he couldn't shut off the power."

"If it ran off alone I don't think it would go very far, Dave."

The bridge reached, they looked around in all directions but could see nothing of the motor cycle. They went down to where Roger had landed and saw the impression of his body and feet in the wet sand.

"He can thank his stars that he didn't break his neck," said Dave. "This beats the fall Paul and I took."

"It's queer you never got to the bottom of that accident, Dave."

"Maybe I will, some day. I am certain that tree didn't fall of itself."

Having spent fully a quarter of an hour in looking for the motor cycle without success, there seemed to be nothing to do but to return to Oak

Hall. This they did, and stored their wheels in the room set apart at the gymnasium for that purpose.

"Didn't find the motor cycle, eh?" said Sam Day, who was practising on the rings. "That is certainly queer."

"Maybe the motor cycle was stolen," suggested Shadow.

"Who would steal such a machine?" asked Ben. "Very few know how to run them."

"They might have taken it away in a wagon. Some people are mean enough to steal anything they lay hands on."

Dave and Ben spent some time in cleaning their bicycles and in oiling them. Then they left the gymnasium in company with Sam Day and several others. As they approached the Hall, Macklin came running out.

"Did you hear the news?" cried the younger student.

"News?" queried Dave. "What news?"

"About Roger Morr?"

"We know he had a bad tumble, and we know we can't find his motor cycle," said Ben.

"Oh, so the machine is gone too," went on Chip Macklin. "Well, that certainly beats all!"

"What beats all?" asked Dave.

"This whole affair about Roger. When they put him to bed they didn't give his clothing much

attention. Now they have just found out that he either lost everything he had or else he was robbed."

"Lost? Robbed?" cried Dave. "Are you sure of this?"

"Yes. You can go up yourself if you wish."

"I will," said Dave, and ran up to the dormitory. Several boys were present and also Dr. Clay and Andrew Dale.

"This is remarkable and must be investigated," Dr. Clay was saying. "Ah, here is Master Porter now. Did you find the motor cycle?"

"No, sir, it wasn't in sight anywhere. Ben and I looked high and low for it."

"Then that must have been stolen too," said Andrew Dale.

"They tell me Roger was robbed," said Ben. "What did he lose?"

"Lost a whole lot of things," replied Roger himself. "My watch and my diamond stickpin, and a gold ring, some loose change, and forty dollars that father sent me for some new books I've been ordering! Somebody cleaned me out for fair!" And the senator's son spoke very disconsolately.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT A RUNAWAY LED TO

THE news that Roger had been robbed while unconscious spread rapidly, and many were the speculations as to who had done the wicked deed.

"I suppose it was somebody who just happened to come along," said Dave. "But what a mean thing to do! That person did not know but that Roger was dying, and made no effort to assist him!"

Roger's story was a brief one. How long he had remained unconscious he did not know. He came to his senses with a shiver, to find himself lying on some rocks under one end of the stone bridge. The lower portion of his body was wet and the chill had aided in reviving him. When he felt strong enough he had crawled up to the road and looked for his motor cycle. Not finding the machine, he had started for Oak Hall on foot. He felt himself growing weaker every step and fell prostrate, as already described, just as Dave and Ben discovered him.

"I am awfully glad you came along," said the senator's son to his two chums. "I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't."

"And you didn't know a thing about being robbed, then?" queried Ben.

"No, all I knew was that I was cold and as weak as a sick cat," was the answer.

A hunt was made for the robber, and the students spent several hours in searching around the spot. Nothing was found, and the local authorities were notified.

This robbery, coupled with those that had gone before, aroused the whole community. Many felt that they were no longer safe in their homes, and a meeting was held in Oakdale and a reward of two hundred dollars put up by the citizens for the capture and conviction of the offenders.

"I will get a private detective to look into this," said Dr. Clay and did so. The detective, a quiet-looking individual named Merivel, arrived the next day and went to work immediately. But the task proved too much for him, and inside of a week he gave it up.

"I reckon I am out my machine and my valuables," said Roger, who was around once more and as well as ever. "But I do wish I could lay hands on the rascal who went through me!"

The days slipped by, and again Dave and his chums devoted themselves to their studies. It was

now growing colder and there was a suggestion of snow in the air.

"It won't be long before we have snow and ice," said Sam. "Hurrah for some fine skating!"

"And snowballing," added Buster. "Don't forget the fun we had last year."

"How we did pelt Pop Swingly!"

"And old Haskers!"

"You've got to be careful what you do to Haskers," said Shadow. "He is just watching for a chance to get somebody into trouble."

"Do you remember how Dave beat Plum in that race on the ice?" said Roger. "That was great!"

"By the way, Plum is cutting quite a dash again," said Buster. "His father must have sent him a lot of spending money."

"Then he can pay up those bets I heard about," said Macklin.

"He has paid them up, so I was told," replied another student. "But I'll wager it made him mad to do so."

"He had no business to bet against his own school," said Sam. "It was a mean piece of business. I've cut him dead for doing it."

What was said about Gus Plum having money was true. He had paid all his debts and in addition had spent several dollars in having a so-called "good time" with Jasniff and Poole in a tavern on the outskirts of Rockville. But he was not

particularly happy, if one was to judge by the worried and scared look that often showed itself on his face. At times it looked as if he wanted to draw away from Nick Jasniff, but that student clung to him closer than ever.

One Friday afternoon Dave, Roger, and Ben got out of school a little early and resolved to walk to Oakdale, just for the exercise and to buy a few things of trifling importance. They were soon on the way, and arriving at the town lost no time in making their purchases. In Oakdale they met Mrs. Fairchild and asked her if she had heard anything concerning the robbery at her house.

"Not a thing," said the widow; "and I suppose I never shall."

With their purchases in their pockets, the students left the town and started on the return to the academy. As it was nipping cold, they walked rapidly, only stopping on the way to pick up some chestnuts which were handy.

Each had his pocket filled with chestnuts, when all heard a commotion around a bend of the road.

"What's that?" questioned Dave, looking ahead.

"Sounds like a runaway!" exclaimed Ben.

"If it is we had better be getting out of the way," said Roger. "I have no desire to be run over."

The noise came closer and from a distance they heard a man shouting wildly.

"Sthop! Sthop, I said! Vot you vants to run avay for, annahow?"

"It's Zumm, the baker!" cried Dave. "His horse must be running away!"

The sounds of hoofs could now be distinguished, and in a moment more the steed came in sight, dragging a baker's wagon behind him. The vehicle swayed from side to side, threatening to go over any instant.

"Look out!"

"He is running away and no mistake!"

"Where is Zumm?"

"He must have been thrown out!"

Nearer and nearer came the frightened horse. He was less than a hundred feet away when he swerved to one side, running two of the wheels of the wagon into some low bushes.

"I am going to stop him if I can!" cried Dave, with sudden determination.

Before Ben or Roger could stop him he was out in the road and leaping for the head of the frightened horse. He caught hold of the bridle and hung fast.

"You'll be killed, Dave!"

"Don't go under his feet!"

"Sthop him, sthop him!" came from the German baker who owned the outfit. He was running

after the horse and wagon as rapidly as his somewhat bulky form permitted.

Dave paid no attention to the cries but clung fast. The horse did a good deal of dancing and prancing but it was of no avail. Finally he backed into the bushes until the back of the wagon struck a tree, and there he remained, trembling violently in every limb.

"Good for you, Dave!" sang out Ben, in admiration. "I must say, you know exactly how to handle a horse."

"Pick up those lines," panted Dave, and stepping forward, Roger did so. Then Ben came up on the other side of the frightened animal and soon they had the horse completely subdued and standing quiet.

"Is he—is he all right, yes?" panted the German baker, coming up all out of breath.

"I think so," answered Dave. "He had a big scare, though."

"Yah, dot's so."

"What made him go off?"

"Noddings but a biece of baber in der road. Ven he see dot, he got so oxcitements like neffer vos alretty!"

"Did he throw you out?" asked Ben.

"No, I vos got out to bick up some chestnuts, and I let him valk along py himselluf. Den all to vonce he kicks up his heels and runds avay kvick!

Next dime ven I go avay I ton't let him alone a minute!"

The German baker was anxious concerning his stock in trade, and while the boys continued to hold the horse he climbed into the wagon to look after his bread, and pastries.

"Chust vot I dink!" he groaned. "Dem nice cakes vos all cracked alretty! Now vot I got to do, tole me dot?"

"Cracked cakes?" queried Roger, with a grin.

"Yah. You see, I vos make some nice cakes for Mrs. Dill's barty. Da vos sphoiled and now I haf to make more."

"Don't throw them away," said Dave. "We'll eat a cracked cake any day."

"So? All right, my poys. You do me a favor to sthop mine horse, I vos gif you der cakes, yes," answered Mr. Zumm.

He was a liberal-hearted man and without delay brought out several large cakes, somewhat crushed and broken but still well worth eating. The sight of such good things set Dave to thinking.

"Fellows, I've got an idea!" he said. "Let's buy Mr. Zumm's cakes and pies and have a feast to-night!"

"Just the thing!" came from both Ben and Roger.

"I not sell you dem cakes," said the baker, when the matter was explained to him. "You vos goot

poys, yes, and I like you. I gif you four pig cakes, mit der pastepoard poxes to carry dem in."

"Thanks, you are very kind," said Dave, and the others said the same. They insisted, however, upon purchasing several pies, and also some chocolate éclairs. The goodies were put into several pasteboard boxes, and then the boys hurried off towards the Hall and Mr. Zumm resumed his journey to town.

The three boys had some little difficulty in getting into Oak Hall with their pasteboard boxes. They were going up a back stairs when Nat Poole caught sight of them.

"Hello, something doing, I'll be bound!" said Poole to himself. "Guess I'll watch and see what it means!"

He crouched out of sight in a dark angle of the hallway and allowed Dave, Roger, and Ben to pass him. Then, when the dormitory door was closed, Nat Poole tiptoed up to it.

"Put the cakes on the top shelf," he heard Dave say. "The pies can go over in that corner."

"A spread!" murmured Nat Poole to himself.

"I don't think we ought to start too early," came in Ben's voice. "Let us make it exactly midnight just for the fun of the thing."

"That suits me," answered the senator's son. "Who is to be invited?"

This was talked over, and it was decided to ask

all the inmates of Dormitories No. 11 and 12 and also a few of the students in No. 8, including Henshaw and Babcock.

"But we want to be very quiet about it," cautioned Dave. "If Haskers should hear of it, he'd make all the trouble he could for us."

"Mum's the word, and I'll tell the other fellows so," answered Roger.

"Don't let Plum, or Poole, or Jasniff get an inkling of this," cautioned Ben. "They would like nothing better than to spoil our fun."

"Yes, we certainly must be careful of that crowd," answered Dave.

The three boys remained in the dormitory for quarter of an hour, talking matters over and making their arrangements for the midnight feast, and Nat Poole took in every word that was said. Then, as Dave, Ben, and Roger started to come out into the hallway, Poole ran off and managed to get down into the dining hall ahead of them.

"I've got news," he whispered to Gus Plum, who sat beside him. "I'll tell you all about it after supper."

"What kind of news?" questioned the bully.

"About a feast. The Porter crowd expects to pull off something big to-night, and I know exactly how we can block their game and land them in all kinds of trouble!"

CHAPTER XXIV

MORE PLANS THAN ONE

DAVE and his chums waited impatiently for bedtime and in the meanwhile the invitation to participate in the coming feast was extended to all who had been mentioned as possible guests. All accepted with pleasure, and Babcock said he expected to have a "whang-bang time," whatever that might mean.

About nine o'clock Dave and Roger got ready to retire to the dormitory. They were just going upstairs when Chip Macklin came rushing up to them.

"Come with me," cried the small student, in breathless tones.

"Where to?" questioned Dave.

"Never mind—come on, and be quick about it."

Seeing that something unusual was up, Dave and Roger followed Macklin to a back hallway. Here the small student looked around cautiously, to make sure that they were not being observed.

"It's all off!" were Macklin's first words. "The

sooner you get rid of that cake and stuff the better!"

"What makes you say that?" demanded Dave.

"I just overheard Nat Poole talking to Plum and Jasniff. They mentioned your name and something about breaking up a feast, and I made up my mind something was in the wind. I don't like to play the sneak any more"—Macklin got red as he said this—"but I felt I had to in this case. Poole told his cronies all about the stuff hidden in our dormitories and about the feast to be had at midnight, and they planned to go to old Haskers and to Dr. Clay and have us all caught red-handed!"

At this announcement the faces of Dave and Roger fell for a moment.

"So you'd better get the stuff out of the way at once," went on Chip Macklin.

"Tell me just what was said," said Dave, after an awkward pause, and Macklin did as requested. As he proceeded Dave's eyes lit up in sudden merriment.

"So that is their game," he said. "Well, we'll pay them back,—just wait and see!"

"One thing is certain, the feast is off," said Roger, with a sigh.

"Not a bit of it," answered Dave. "Didn't you hear what Chip said? They are going to rouse up Haskers and Dr. Clay about eleven o'clock, so as

to catch us red-handed. What's the matter with having our little jollification before that time?"

"Good for you, Dave! But we'll have to be careful——"

"Leave it to me, and I'll fix the whole thing," replied Dave.

It was not long after that when all the pupils of Oak Hall retired to their dormitories. In the meantime Dave lost no time in going among his chums and acquainting them with the new order of things.

Dave's plan worked like a charm. He rightfully guessed that Nat Poole would be listening at one of the dormitory doors. Accordingly he spoke in a loud voice after the door was locked.

"We'll have to wait until twelve o'clock before we touch a mouthful," he said. "In the meantime let us fix that lemonade and those other things. All of the other fellows will come in at exactly quarter to twelve. The feast is to last from twelve to one o'clock."

"I'm sorry I've got to wait until twelve o'clock," said Ben, in an equally loud tone. "But if that is the rule of this club, why, I'll have to obey."

"Those other good things won't arrive until quarter to twelve," said Roger.

So the talk ran on until the boys were undressed and ready to retire. Then the lights were put out and all became quiet.

In the darkened hallway Babcock was on guard. Soon he came in with a broad grin on his face.

"You've fooled 'em completely," he whispered. "They have arranged to call up the doctor and old Haskers at exactly half-past eleven, and they are going to pounce in here just a few minutes after twelve,—when they expect everything to be in full blast. Plum says he will help smash down a door, if it is necessary."

"Well, it won't be necessary," answered Dave, dryly.

As soon as all was quiet, the good things were brought forth and all the invited guests lost no time in "making themselves at home," as Buster Beggs expressed it. Growing boys always have tremendous appetites, and it did not take long for the larger portion of the cakes and pies to disappear.

"Ah!" sighed Sam Day, at last. "I must let up, I am too full for utterance."

"I can't eat another mouthful," said Polly Vane, as he finished a chocolate éclair. "It was delicious, though."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow, who sat on the edge of a table eating a quarter of a pumpkin pie. "A poor boy went to a Sunday school picnic, and when eating time came he filled up on sandwiches and cake and lemonade until he was ready to burst. Then they brought

around some ice-cream. 'Johnny,' says a lady, 'you'll have some ice-cream, won't you?' Johnny looked at her for a minute, his face full of sorrow. 'Can't,' says he. 'Why not?' says the lady. 'Because,' says he, 'I—I kin melt it, ma'am, but I can't swaller it!' " And a laugh went up.

"What are you putting away?" asked Roger of Dave, who was filling two large paper bags with cake crumbs and pie crusts. "Going to feed the birds?"

"No, I've got a little plan. Won't these do more good in Plum's dormitory than in ours?"

"Eureka!" shouted Buster, and then checked himself. "It's a splendid plan!" he whispered.

"Wait till they go off to rouse up the doctor and old Haskers," said Ben.

"That's what I had in mind to do."

The boys assembled went over the dormitories with care, cleaning up every evidence of the feast. Everything that was left was put in paper bags, which Dave had provided. Then came a rather tedious wait on the part of the majority, Dave and Roger meanwhile slipping out to learn what the enemy was doing.

At last came the opportunity for which Dave was waiting. He saw Poole, Plum, and Jasniff leave their dormitory and hurry towards the rooms occupied by the master of the Hall and his second assistant.

"There they go, Dave!"

"I see them, Roger. Quick! back to the room with you!"

They ran to their own dormitory and in a minute reappeared with the bags of broken cake and pie crusts. With these they rushed to the dormitory occupied by the bully of the school and his cronies. The door was ajar and all was dark inside, the students not in Poole's plot being sound asleep.

With deft hands Dave and Roger distributed the broken cake and the pie crusts, putting some on a table, some on a desk, a portion in the beds occupied by Plum, Poole, and Jasniff, and the remainder on the window sill and the floor. Then they overturned a chair, and shoved one of the beds partly against the door, so that it could not be readily closed.

"Now for the alarm!" cried Dave, and lit several gas jets. Then he and Roger set up a sudden yell and ran with might and main for their own room.

Dr. Clay and Job Haskers had just been awakened by Poole and his cronies when the alarm sounded. This aroused Andrew Dale and fully two score of students, and all rushed into the hallways to learn what it meant.

"A feast in Dormitory 12, eh?" said the worthy master of Oak Hall. "I'll see about this!" And he donned his dressing gown.

By the time he reached Dormitory 12 the whole school was in an uproar. Some thought there might be a fire, and there was great excitement.

"If the place is on fire, I want to get out!" cried one student.

"There is no fire!" answered Dave. "I think it's a false alarm."

"Didn't the alarm come from Plum's room?" asked one pupil.

"I think it did," answered another.

"Let us go see what is up!"

Many rushed in that direction, followed by Andrew Dale. Then came a cry of astonishment from the first assistant.

"What does this mean? A feast, I declare."

"A feast!" said Dr. Clay, who was in the rear. "I was told there was a feast going on in Dormitory No. 12!"

"You can see for yourself, Doctor."

"I do see," answered the master of the Hall, severely. "Plum, what does this mean?"

"I—er—I don't know," stammered the bully. He was so amazed that he could not collect his senses.

"Poole, can you tell me what this means?"

"N—no, sir. I—I haven't had a thing, sir."

"Jasniff, what about this?"

Nick Jasniff shrugged his shoulders. "I thought

there was something going on in Porter's room. Poole said so."

"Well, who sounded that alarm here?" thundered Dr. Clay.

To this question there was no answer.

"We had better look in No. 12," suggested Job Haskers, who had just come up, wrapped in a flannel robe and wearing slippers.

The doctor and his assistants turned to the dormitory occupied by Dave and his chums, and then looked into the bedroom adjoining. Everything was as clean and orderly as could be. The boys were up, but they were not dressed.

"What's the row?" asked Buster Beggs, sleepily. "Oh, Doctor, is that you? I thought I heard some noise."

"Didn't you hear the alarm?" asked Dave. "I thought it woke up everybody."

The doctor said little but looked around the rooms with care, and so did Job Haskers.

"Some mistake evidently," muttered the assistant.

"I am going to find out what the crumbs in that other dormitory mean," answered Dr. Clay.

He passed out, and meeting Poole in the hallway caught the pupil by the shoulder.

"Just come with me," he said, and led the way back to the room Nat occupied with his cronies. "Now, explain this!" he demanded.

Of course poor Nat Poole could not explain, and neither could Plum nor Jasniff. They tried to tell their story, but for once the doctor was too impatient to listen.

"As there was no cause for that alarm, I want you all to go to bed," said he, after listening to a few words. "It is midnight and I want all of you to get your night's rest. In the morning I'll make an investigation."

"What of this muss?" faltered Poole.

"Clean it up, every bit of it!" thundered the doctor, and passed out and to his own room once more.

"I won't touch the stuff!" snarled Nat Poole.

"Neither will I," came from Plum.

"Nor I," added Jasniff.

"Are you going to disobey?" demanded Job Haskers, who had remained on the scene.

His manner was so menacing that the three students shrank before him.

"It wasn't our fault——" began Plum.

"Enough. I can see through your doings. You tried to get others into trouble to hide your own tracks. This plot will not work with me. In the morning you must clean this apartment thoroughly, or I will punish you severely!" And having thus delivered himself Job Haskers stalked off, leaving Plum, Poole, and Jasniff the maddest students Oak Hall had ever known.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIGHT IN THE GYMNASIUM

"THIS is some more of Porter's doings," growled the bully of Oak Hall, when he and his cronies found themselves alone.

"That's it," agreed Jasniff. "Confound him, I'd like to wring his neck!"

"I suppose they had their feast on the quiet," grumbled Poole. "We were foolish that we did not watch them more closely."

The three went to bed and in the morning set to work to clean up the dormitory. Then they had to go downstairs, to be interviewed by Job Haskers, who gave them some extra lessons to learn, as a punishment. He would listen to no explanation from them, happening to be in a thoroughly bad humor himself.

The next few days proved unusually cold, and then came a snowstorm which covered the ground to the depth of several inches. The students got as much fun out of the downfall as possible, snowballing each other with great glee. They also took

shots at Pop Swingly and Horsehair while the pair were engaged in cleaning off the walks.

"Hi! hi! stop that!" roared Swingly, as a snowball from Ben took him in the back. Then one from Roger knocked off his hat. At the same time Dave, rushing by, threw some loose snow down Jackson Lemond's back.

"Whow!" spluttered the driver, dropping his broom and working at his neck. "Who did that? Birr! it's as cold as a cake o' ice!" And he began to shiver and dance around.

"This weather will surely make ice," said Sam, and he was right, for that night several inches of ice formed on the river, and this made all the students look forward eagerly to the time when there would be skating.

Frank Bond had quite recovered from the shock he had received at the hands of Plum and his cohorts. But he was still the pale, delicate, and nervous boy as of old and shrank from contact with the more boisterous students. He appreciated what Dave and his chums had done for him and did his best to give the bully of the Hall a wide berth. He was a studious lad, and soon a warm friendship sprang up between him and Polly Vane and they often studied their lessons together, Polly giving the younger lad all the assistance he could.

During those days Dave looked eagerly for letters from the Wadsworths, Caspar Potts, and his

Uncle Dunston. The letters came and were full of kind words and best wishes, yet the communication from his uncle filled him with anxiety. In part this letter read as follows:

"Strange as it may appear, I have not yet received a line from your father or your sister Laura. I cannot imagine where they can be that they do not send word of some kind. If they had received even one letter from me concerning you, I feel sure your father would not lose a moment in answering. I have sent to a dozen places for information, but all in vain."

"This is certainly a mystery," Dave said to Roger. "What do you make of it?"

"Oh, I shouldn't worry too much," answered the senator's son, hopefully. "Your father and sister are probably traveling in some out-of-the-way place in Europe where the letters and cablegrams haven't reached them."

"Waiting is very hard, Roger."

"I know it must be. I suppose you want to know what your father and sister are like."

"That's it, and I want to be with them, too," answered the former poorhouse youth.

Dave wanted to find Ben, to get a book the latter had been reading. He was told that Ben was down to the gymnasium and so strolled in that

direction. The building was almost deserted, not more than half a dozen students being present.

In one corner was Gus Plum and not far away Jasniff lounged on a bench. Between the pair stood Frank Bond, his face having a white and scared look upon it.

"Please, Plum, I don't care to do such things," Frank was saying. "I'd rather you'd excuse me."

"You'll do what I want you to do!" answered Plum, brutally. "You can't back out now."

"But I don't want to——" began the small boy, when of a sudden the bully of Oak Hall caught him by the ear.

"See here, you imp, you listen to me!" snarled Plum. "I haven't forgotten what trouble you got me into before. Now you mind me——"

"Oh, let go, please let go!" screamed Frank. "Don't pull my ear off!"

He tried to break away, but the bully held him fast. The next moment, however, Dave stepped between.

"Plum, I want you to let Frank alone," said Dave, quietly but firmly, and at the same time looking the bully squarely in the eyes.

"Look here, this is none of your affair," blustered Plum.

"Let him go, I say—and at once," and now Dave clenched his fists.

"You want more trouble with me, eh?" growled

Plum, releasing the small boy and sticking his chin in Dave's face.

"No, I do not want trouble, but I am able to meet it if it comes," answered Dave, not budging an inch. "You ought to be ashamed to bulldoze such a small chap as Frank. Why don't you leave him alone, as the doctor told you to do?"

"See here, I don't want you to preach to me!" roared Plum. "I know my own business and I don't want you to put in your oar!"

"That's the talk," came from Jasniff.

Instantly Dave swung around on his heel.

"This is certainly none of your business, Jasniff," he said, coldly.

"Ain't it? Well, Gus is my particular friend, and what concerns him concerns me," blustered Jasniff.

"Oh, Dave, let us go away," whispered Frank, growing more frightened than ever.

"You can go away if you wish, Frank. I am not afraid of these two bullies; Plum knows that, even if Jasniff does not."

At this home thrust Gus Plum winced, for he had not forgotten the drubbing received from Dave in times gone by. Jasniff, however, was undismayed, and striding closer, he pushed in between Plum and Dave.

"I've heard of the unfair advantage you once took of Gus, but you can't take such an advantage

of me," he said, loudly. "I am not afraid of anybody in this school, and I want you to know it."

His manner was so offensive that it caused the quick blood to rush to Dave's face. Plum fell back and so did Frank Bond. There was a moment of suggestive silence.

"Jasniff, I never took any unfair advantage of Plum, and everybody in this school knows it," said Dave, steadily. "Plum is a bully,—and you appear to be built the same way."

"So I'm a bully, eh?" stormed Nick Jasniff, putting up his fists.

"You are."

"Do you want me to fight you?"

"No, I'd prefer not to dirty my hands on you."

"Maybe you think you can lick me?"

"I am not doing any thinking on that subject."

"You can't talk to me like this—I won't allow it," stormed Jasniff, putting up his fists again. "If you want to fight, say so!" So speaking, he gave Dave a sudden shove that sent him up against Frank Bond.

"Oh, Dave, don't let him hit you!" gasped the little lad. "He is so big and strong——"

Dave did not answer—indeed, it is doubtful if he heard the words. With a quick leap forward, he caught Nick Jasniff by both arms and backed him against the side of the building.

"Let go!" screamed Jasniff, in a rage. "Let go, I say!"

"Listen to me, Jasniff," returned Dave, still holding the squirming student. "I don't want to fight, but if you attack me, I'll not only defend myself, but I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life. I understand you thoroughly. You are not only a bully but worse. Why Dr. Clay allows you to remain here I don't know. I want you to understand once for all you can't bulldoze me."

"That's the talk!" said Shadow, who had walked up.

"Make him keep his distance, Dave," added Buster, who was with the youth who loved to tell stories.

"Bulldoze you?" stormed Nick Jasniff. "I'll show you what I'll do—you poorhouse rat! I'll make mincemeat of you!'

So speaking, he tore himself loose from Dave and backed away a few steps. Then, with clenched fists, he rushed in and aimed a heavy blow at Dave's face.

The fist struck Dave's ear, for the latter did what he could to dodge. Then came another blow on the shoulder and one on the chin, all delivered with lightning-like rapidity. Nick Jasniff was a boxer, and could use his fists better than he could learn his lessons.

"Good!" shouted Gus Plum, gleefully. "That's the way to do it, Nick!"

"Knock him out!" added Nat Poole, but keeping safely in the background.

Dave backed away a step or two and again Jasniff came at him, hitting him a light blow in the arm. Then the boxer struck out again for Dave's face.

But this blow did not land. Instead, Dave leaped to one side and struck out himself, hitting Jasniff in the left ear. This was followed by a tap on the chin and another in the ribs. Jasniff tried to land on Dave's chest, but failed, and Dave came back once more with a crack on his opponent's nose that caused the blood to spurt.

"A fight! A fight!"

"Look at that blow!"

"Jasniff is quick, ain't he?"

"First blood for Dave Porter!"

Again the two boys went at it, and for several minutes blows were given and taken with remarkable rapidity. With his skill as a boxer, Jasniff had anticipated an easy victory; he was astonished at the manner in which Dave parried some of his blows. Around and around the gymnasium floor circled the two boys, and as the shouting grew louder the crowd increased.

The blood was now flowing not alone from Jasniff's nose but also from a scratch on Dave's chin.

A few more passes and the two clinched, Jasniff getting Dave's head under his arm. But with a sudden turn Dave cleared himself, and hit his opponent in the teeth, again drawing blood. Wild with rage, Jasniff threw prudence to the winds and leaped forward literally to crush the youth who dared oppose him.

To him who loses his wits in such a situation as this, all is lost. Blinded by rage Jasniff forgot to guard himself and in a trice received a blow in the left eye that made him see stars. Then, as he plunged forward again, another swift and heavy blow hit him squarely on the chin. His head went up and back with a jerk, his form swayed from side to side, and down he went on the floor with a thud, and lay there like a log.

"My! what a blow!"

"Jasniff is knocked out clean and clear!"

"I never saw anything like it in my life!"

So the cries ran on, while Nick Jasniff lay where he had fallen. For the moment nobody approached the prostrate youth, then Plum stepped to his side, shaking, he knew not why.

"Nick! Nick!" he called, softly, as he raised the fallen one's head. "I say, Nick!"

"Sh—shall I get some water?" faltered Nat Poole. He too was shaking.

"Yes."

While the water was being brought, Jasniff was

helped to a sitting position. He was still all but overcome. His cronies bathed his face and did what they could to bring him around. In the meantime Dave and his friends withdrew to another corner of the gymnasium.

"So he knocked me out, eh?" snarled Jasniff, when he was able to speak. "Just wait, I'll fix him yet!"

"What, you're not going to fight again?" asked Plum, in astonishment.

"Ain't I?" snarled Nick Jasniff. "I'll either lick him, or he'll kill me!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NICK JASNIFF

"HERE comes Jasniff again!" exclaimed Shadow. "He looks mad enough to eat you up, Dave!"

"I thought he was done for," said Ben, who had been wiping the blood from Dave's chin.

The crowd parted as the boy who had been knocked out strode forward. His gait was unsteady and from his eyes there gleamed a wild fire awful to behold.

"Thought you had got rid of me, eh?" he cried. "Well, I am not done for yet!" And with this he struck Dave in the shoulder.

"If you want more you shall have it, Jasniff!" retorted Dave, and struck out in return. Then the blows came as rapidly as before. Dave was hit twice in the chest and came back with a crack on Jasniff's ear and one in the right eye that made the youth see more stars than ever. Then, as they circled around the floor, Dave watched his chance and hit his opponent once more in the nose, causing him to slip and pitch over on his side.

"Another knockdown!"

"Jasniff, you had better give it up."

"Porter has the best of you, Nick."

If ever a boy was mad that boy was Nick Jasniff. Half blinded from the blow in the eye he rolled over and got up on his knees. Then he leaped to his feet and ran to the wall of the gymnasium.

"I'll fix you! I'll fix you!" he snarled, and pulled from its resting place a wooden Indian club weighing at least three pounds. "You shan't crow over Nick Jasniff, not much!"

"Hold up, what are you going to do?" cried Ben, who stood near.

"I'm going to smash his head for him!" answered Jasniff, and before anybody could stop him he made a dash for where Dave was standing. He swung the Indian club around so recklessly that the crowd parted right and left to let him pass.

Dave saw him approach and for the moment hardly knew what to do. He had not dreamed of such unfair play. It was easy to see that Jasniff was in a frame of mind fit for any foul deed.

"Don't!" he cried, as the half-crazed lad leaped before him. "Stop, I tell you!" And then as the Indian club was swung over his head, he leaped to one side and caught the other boy around the waist with both arms. "Drop that club, you brute!"

"Drop the club! Drop the club!" came from all sides, and in a twinkling Ben and Shadow

leaped in and wrenched the Indian club from Jasniff's grasp.

"What an outrage!"

"Jasniff, you ought to be lynched for that!"

"This is a young gentlemen's school, not a resort for toughs."

So the cries ran on. Jasniff tried to speak, but nobody would listen to him, and even Plum and Poole knew enough to keep silent. Dave retained his hold a few seconds and then pushed his opponent from him.

"I am done with you, Jasniff," said he, in a clear, hard voice. "Done with you, understand? I'll never dirty my hands on you again. If you dare to molest me in the future, I'll hand you over to the police. They are the only ones to handle such a coward and brute as you."

Everybody heard the words and many applauded them. Plum and Poole fell back and the face of each grew scarlet. Nick Jasniff stood stock still, breathing heavily. He wanted to do something terrible,—but he did not dare. Dave was pale and his jaws were firmly set. The tension all around was extreme.

Then Jasniff moved, turning his back on Dave. He looked at Plum and Poole, but they cast their eyes to the ground. The crowd parted and Jasniff walked away, slowly and unsteadily. In a minute he left the gymnasium, slamming the door

after him. There was a long sigh of relief over his departure.

"Dave, I really think he meant to kill you!" said Ben, coming up and clutching his chum by the arm.

"That's what he did!" said Buster Beggs. "His eyes had a terrible look in them."

"Perhaps you are mistaken," answered Dave, in an odd voice that sounded strange even to himself. "But I—well, I don't propose to fight a fellow with Indian clubs."

"He ought to be bounced out of this school," said Luke Watson.

"I'll never speak to him again," asserted Babcock.

"Wonder what Dr. Clay will say when he hears of this fight?" said Roger, who had come in during the wind-up. "I suppose he won't like it at all."

"He can't blame Dave," answered Ben.

"Porter started the quarrel by interfering with me," said Gus Plum.

"What, Gus, do you stand up for Jasniff?" demanded Shadow.

"Well, I—er——"

"I don't see how anybody can stand up for Jasniff," said Messmer. "I used to go with him, but I am glad now that I cut him."

"I am not standing up for that Indian club affair," said Gus Plum, lamely, and walked away, followed by Nat Poole.

"Oh, Dave, you did fight him most beautifully," cried Frank Bond, his delicate face glowing. "Oh, I wish I was as strong as you!"

"Perhaps you will be some day, Frank. Go out in the fresh air all you can, and take plenty of exercise here in the gym. Do you know what made me strong? Working on a farm,—cutting wood and plowing, and things like that."

Dave retired to the washroom and there bathed his face and hands, and combed his hair. The blood soon stopped flowing from his chin and the scratch showed but little. Many wanted to congratulate him on his victory, but he motioned them away.

"Thank you, boys, but I don't want you to do that," he said, quietly. "I want to tell you plainly that I don't believe in fighting any more than Dr. Clay does. It's brutal to fight, and that is all there is to it. But every fellow ought to know how to defend himself, and when he is attacked as I was he has got to do the best he can for himself. If Jasniff hadn't pitched into me roughshod I should never have fought with him."

"Do you really mean that, Porter?" asked a voice from the other side of the washroom, and Andrew Dale stepped out from behind a high roller-towel rack. The first assistant teacher had come in just as the encounter was ending.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Dale? Yes, sir, I do

mean it," answered Dave. "Did you see the fight, may I ask?"

"I saw Jasniff attack you with the Indian club, but I was too far off to take a hand. You say he attacked you first?"

"He did, and some of those here can prove it."

"That's right," said several of the students.

"What was the quarrel about?"

"It began between Plum and myself. Plum was browbeating Frank Bond and I told him to stop. Then Jasniff put in his say, and I told him it was none of his business. Then he wanted to know if I wanted to fight, and I told him I preferred not to dirty my hands on him. Then he shoved me and struck me two or three times. Then—well, then I sailed in and knocked him down twice. Then he got the Indian club, and you know the rest."

"That's the truth of it, Mr. Dale," said Frank.

"Absolutely," added another student, who had seen the whole affair.

"Well, Porter, you had better come to the doctor's office and we'll investigate further," said the teacher, and a little later Dave found himself confronting the master of Oak Hall. He told his story in a straightforward manner and mentioned the names of several who had witnessed the affair. Then he was told he could go, and Frank was called in, and then Ben, Shadow, Buster, and later

still Plum and Poole. The doctor questioned all closely, and finally sent Andrew Dale after Jasniff, but the youth could not be found.

"Has he left the school grounds?" questioned Dr. Clay.

"I could not find that out," answered the assistant. "Nobody seems to have seen him since he left the gymnasium."

"Well, as soon as he shows himself, send him to me."

"I will, sir."

"From what I can learn, he is a thoroughly bad boy," went on the master of Oak Hall, beginning to pace the floor of his office. "I must confess I hardly know what to do with him."

"He is a bad boy, no doubt of that," answered the teacher. "And he has a bad influence on some of the other boys."

"You mean Plum and Poole?"

"I do."

"I believe you are right. Do you think he ought to be sent from the school?"

"Yes, unless he will make an earnest endeavor to mend his ways, Doctor."

"There is one trouble in the way, Mr. Dale. His folks are now in Europe for the benefit of Mrs. Jasniff's health. If I send him off, he will have no place to go to."

"You can write to his father explaining the situa-

tion. He may write to his son and that may help matters."

"I have already determined to send a letter. But Mr. Jasniff knows his son is wild—he wanted me to tame him down. But I don't see how I can do it. Supposing he had brained Porter!" Dr. Clay shivered. "I should never have gotten over it, and it would have ruined the school!"

"There is another thing to consider, sir," pursued the assistant. "It may be that Porter will write to his uncle about this, and his relative may be afraid to let the boy remain here while Jasniff stays."

"No, I questioned Porter about that. What do you think he said?" The master of Oak Hall smiled slightly. "He said he could take care of himself and he could make Jasniff keep his distance. He certainly has courage."

"He is the grittiest boy in the school—and one of the best, too," answered Andrew Dale, heartily. And there the conversation came to an end.

The fight between Jasniff and Dave was the sole topic discussed that evening at Oak Hall. The boys who had not witnessed the encounter could scarcely believe that Dave had knocked the other student down twice and blackened his eyes, and they could scarcely credit the fact that Jasniff in his rage and humiliation had attacked Dave with the heavy Indian club. Some went to Jasniff's dormi-

tory, only to learn that the student was missing.

In the dormitory Plum and Poole sat in a warm corner, talking the affair over in a low tone. To do them justice, both were horrified over the club incident. Each had seen that awful look in Jasniff's eyes and each had expected to see Dave stretched lifeless on the gymnasium floor.

"I—I didn't think it of Nick!" whispered Poole. "He certainly went too far."

"He was so wild he didn't know what he was doing," answered Plum. "It doesn't pay to get that way. If he had really killed Porter——"

"Oh, don't say it, Gus! Why, it makes me tremble yet," whined Nat Poole. "If Nick is going to act like that, I'm going to have nothing more to do with him. What if something had happened? He might have dragged us into it somehow—we've been so thick with him."

To this Gus Plum did not answer, but a far-away, thoughtful look came into his eyes.

"It doesn't pay to be too thick with a fellow like that," pursued Nat Poole. "He'll get you into a hole some time or other."

"Maybe you're right, Nat." Gus Plum drew a long breath. "I wish——" The bully of Oak Hall suddenly checked himself.

"What do you wish?"

"I sometimes wish I had never been thick with

Nick. But he——" Again Plum checked himself. "By the way," he resumed, "did that new allowance come in yet?"

"No. My dad wrote he wouldn't allow me a cent until next month. Why?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter." The bully drew another long breath. "I thought perhaps you'd lend me a little."

"Why, I thought you had what you wanted!" cried Poole, in astonishment.

"I did have, but I—— Well, it doesn't matter, Nat. I'll get along somehow." And then Gus Plum heaved a deeper sigh than ever. Evidently there was something on his mind which worried him considerably.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT HAPPENED AT ROCKVILLE

"Boys, how is this for weather!" called out Roger, the following morning. "Isn't it cold enough to freeze the hind leg off a wooden horse?"

"I guess the bottom has dropped out of the thermometer," answered Dave, as he followed Roger in rising.

"How do you feel, Dave?"

"Oh, pretty good. My chin is a little swollen and my shoulder is somewhat stiff, that's all."

"Wonder if Jasniff is back yet," said Ben.

All the boys wondered that, and Luke Watson took it upon himself to dress in a hurry and go out for information.

"Nothing seen of him yet," announced Luke, on returning.

"Perhaps he has run away for good!" cried Buster.

"He's afraid the doctor will punish him severely," said Polly Vane. "It was such a—er—outrageous thing to do, don't you know."

"He's a tough boy," was Roger's comment.

"Oh, say, speaking of a tough boy puts me in mind of a story I heard yesterday," said Shadow, who sat on the edge of his bed, lacing his shoes. "A young married lady——"

"Gracious, Shadow, how can you tell stories on a cold morning like this?" interrupted Dave.

"Shadow would rather tell stories than keep warm," said Roger, with a smile.

"Maybe this is a hot one," said Ben, grinning.

"Now you just listen," pursued Shadow. "A young married lady went and bought a barrel of best flour——"

"Four X or Not At Home brand?" questioned Buster, innocently.

"If you interrupt me I'll throw the soap at you, Buster. This was a barrel of guaranteed flour. Two days later she came back to the grocer with a very indignant look on her face. 'That flour is no good,' says she to Mr. Grocer. 'Why not?' says the grocer. 'Because it is tough,' says the lady. 'I made doughnuts with it yesterday and my husband thought they were paperweights!' "

"No well-bred lady would say that," came softly from Dave.

"O my! what a pun!" cried Roger. "Well, she wasn't well-bred, she was poor-bread." And then a general laugh went up.

It was indeed cold, with the sun hiding behind a gray sky and a keen north wind blowing. When

they went below they ran into Babcock, who had been down to the river.

"The ice is coming along finely," said Babcock. "I think we'll be able to skate by to-morrow."

All the boys hoped so, and as soon as they could went down to the river to look at the ice. It was moderately firm and some lads were already sliding on a stretch of meadow. But Dr. Clay would not let them go on the river proper until it was safe.

That day the master of Oak Hall sent out Andrew Dale and Swingly the janitor to look for Nick Jasniff. But the search proved of no avail. Wherever the student was, he managed to cover up his tracks completely.

By Monday of the following week skating was at its best, and many hours were spent by Dave and the others on the ice. They skated for miles, and also had half a dozen races, including one between Dave, Roger, and Messmer, in which the two chums came out even, with Messmer not far behind.

During those days came word that Phil was slowly but steadily improving. This news was greeted with satisfaction by all his friends, who hoped that he would soon be able to come to school again.

"We can't get along without him," said Dave, and Roger echoed the sentiment.

The senator's son had received word from two

of his friends, who were now students at one of the leading colleges. Both belonged to a glee club which was to give an entertainment at Rockville Hall on Tuesday night.

"I'd like to go to that entertainment and hear Jack and Joe sing," said Roger. "I wonder if the doctor will let me off?"

The matter was explained, and in the end it was agreed to let the senator's son go to the entertainment, taking Dave and Shadow with him for company. As skating was so good, the students decided to go by way of the river, walking the distance from Rockville Landing to the hall where the entertainment was to take place.

It was a bright moonlight night when the three started and all were in the best of spirits. There were a few skaters out, mostly grown folk, so the way was by no means lonely. They had plenty of time, so did not hurry.

"We don't want to overheat ourselves," said Roger. "Perhaps the hall will be warm, and then we won't be able to stand it."

Arriving at Rockville Landing, they took off their skates and left them at one of the boathouses. Then they walked through the town, past the brightly lighted shops, and stopped at one place for some candy and glasses of hot chocolate.

"Well, I never!" cried Dave, suddenly, as they were leaving the shop.

"What's up?" queried Shadow.

"Did you know that Gus Plum was coming here?"

"I certainly did not," answered the senator's son. "Where is he?"

"I just saw him over there. He passed around that corner."

"Maybe you were mistaken in the person," ventured Shadow.

"I think not."

"He may have come over,—to go to the entertainment, just as we are doing."

"He doesn't care for music."

"I know that."

The three boys walked to the corner and looked down the side street. Nobody resembling the bully of Oak Hall was in sight.

Five minutes later found them at the place where the entertainment was to take place. Roger took his chums around to the stage door and in, and introduced Dave and Shadow to his friends, and then the students from Oak Hall went around to the front and secured seats near one of the boxes.

The programme was a light and varied one—such as are usually given by college glee clubs—and Dave and his chums enjoyed it thoroughly. One bass singer rendered a topical song, the glee club joining in the chorus. This was wildly ap-

plauded, and the singer had to give at least a dozen verses of the effusion.

"This is all right!" whispered Dave. "I wish our glee club could do as well."

"Maybe it will—when the boys are as old as these fellows," answered Shadow.

"These fellows are the best singers at the college," said Roger. "They can't get into the club unless they have first-class voices."

The concert came to an end about half-past ten o'clock, and Roger waited for a while, in order to talk to his friends again. Then he, Dave, and Shadow started on the return to Oak Hall.

Their course took them past the railroad station and a row of small dwellings. Just as they were between the station and the dwellings a light from a street lamp fell full upon two persons standing some distance away.

"Look! there is Gus Plum again!" cried Dave.

"Yes, and that is Nick Jasniff with him!" said the senator's son, in a tone of great surprise.

"Let us go over and make sure," suggested Shadow.

The three started across the street, and as they did so Plum and Jasniff moved away in the direction of one of the dwelling houses. Before they could be stopped they had mounted the porch, opened the door, and gone inside. Those outside heard the door locked, and then all became quiet.

"Well, I never!" came from Dave. "This is certainly a mystery."

There was good cause for his words. The front of the dwelling was entirely dark and the lower windows had the solid wooden shutters tightly closed.

"Shall I ring the bell?" asked Roger, after a pause in perplexity.

"There is no bell to ring," answered Shadow.

"I wouldn't knock," advised Dave. "What's the use? We may only get into a row."

"The doctor ought to know that Jasniff is here," said Roger.

"We can tell him that, even if Plum won't," added Shadow. "I agree with Dave, it will do no good to knock."

"I'd like to know if they saw us," said Dave, as he and his chums continued on their way up the street.

"If they didn't it's queer why they should get out of sight in such a hurry," replied the senator's son.

"Perhaps Jasniff is going to get Plum to smooth matters over with the doctor," was Dave's comment. "He may be sick of staying away from the Hall."

"Dave, what are you going to do if he does come back?" asked Shadow, curiously.

"Do? Nothing."

"Aren't you afraid of him in the least?"

"Oh, I shall keep on my guard, for fear he may play me some foul trick."

"I'd rather he'd go away for good."

"So would I," added Shadow.

"Oh, I don't know. He may reform. If he wants to reform, I'd like to give him the chance."

"He'll never reform," said Roger, decidedly. "He is a bad egg through and through."

"Just what I think," said Shadow. "To my mind, he is much worse than Plum or Poole."

"Oh, I know that," returned Dave.

Arriving at the boathouse, they got out their skates and put them on. While they were doing this, two men, wrapped up in heavy overcoats, walked up over the ice and passed down the street in the direction from whence the students had come.

"There's the long and the short of it," said Roger, with a laugh. He had noticed that one man was unusually tall and the other unusually short.

"Well, men can't all be of a size," laughed Dave. "That little man had all he could do to keep up with the big fellow," he added.

The skate to the school was a fine one and they arrived at Oak Hall just as the silvery moon was sinking behind the distant hills. Swingly let them in, and inside of quarter of an hour the boys were in bed and in the land of dreams.

The next day was a busy one for Dave. He had some extra hard lessons, to which he applied himself with vigor. An examination was soon to take place and he was determined to come out at the top if it could possibly be accomplished.

"Gracious, I can't grind like that," said Roger, but half in admiration.

"Dave has his eye on that medal of honor," said Ben. "Well, it is certainly well worth working for."

The weather had changed and by noontime it was snowing furiously. Dave had not seen Gus Plum in the morning, but the bully was at the dinner table as usual. Shadow had reported seeing Nick Jasniff in Rockville to the doctor, but had given no particulars. Dr. Clay had said he would look into the matter, and sent Andrew Dale to Rockville for that purpose.

It was not until evening that the assistant teacher returned from the neighboring town. He had seen nothing of Nick Jasniff, although he had hunted thoroughly and even visited the house Shadow had mentioned.

"The house was locked up, and when I knocked on the door nobody came to answer my summons."

This was as much as Andrew Dale could tell concerning the missing student. But he brought other news, which was flying over the country-side

like wildfire. During the night thieves had broken into the railroad station at Rockville, opened the old-fashioned safe, and stolen nearly three hundred dollars in money, some checks, and several bundles of railroad tickets.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ICE-BOAT RACE

"WHAT do you think of that?" cried Roger, when the news was circulated among the boys.

"I think the deed was done by the same fellows who robbed Mrs. Fairchild and Mr. Lapham," said Ben. "The authorities are dead slow that they don't catch the rascals. They must certainly be hanging out somewhere in this district."

"Boys, I've got an idea!" cried Dave. "Mrs. Fairchild said the man she saw was rather tall. Don't you remember the tall man we saw last night?"

"To be sure, and the short fellow with him," exclaimed Roger. "They may be the very rascals!"

"Let us tell the doctor of this," said Shadow, and forthwith they went to Dr. Clay, who listened to their story with interest.

"I will notify the authorities," he said. "How did the men look in the face?"

"I didn't see their faces," answered Roger.

"One had a beard, I think," ventured Shadow.

"Both had reddish beards," answered Dave, "and they had reddish mustaches, too."

This was as much as the boys could tell. Later it was learned that the tall and the short man had been seen before and it was pretty clearly established that they had had something to do with all of the robberies throughout that district. But the men were missing, and what had become of them nobody could tell. The local papers came out with a full account of the robbery and not only mentioned the money that had been taken but also the names on the checks, and the lists of stolen railroad tickets. These accounts Dave and his chums read with interest.

"Say, I saw a funny thing just now," said Ben, coming to Dave and Sam Day a little later, while both were doing some sums in algebra. "I was in the library and so were a lot of fellows, including Plum and Poole. Plum has been on the sick list to-day and wasn't downstairs when the news came in about that Rockville affair. He took up one of the papers and began to read about the robbery, and all at once he staggered back. I thought he was fainting. He grabbed the paper with all his might and his eyes almost started out of his head. He would have gone over, only Poole caught him and led him to a chair. Then he said his head hurt him and he went to his dormitory."

"That was certainly queer," said Dave, thoughtfully.

"He acted just as if that news was some kind of a blow to him," went on Ben.

"I don't see how it could affect him," said Sam Day. "I guess it was just his sickness."

Sam did not know that Gus Plum had been seen in Rockville the night the robbery occurred, and Dave did not feel called upon to enlighten him. But Ben knew, and he and Dave walked away to talk the matter over, being joined a moment later by Roger and Shadow.

"Plum was certainly in Rockville," said Shadow, "but I don't see how that connects him with the robbery." He was voicing a thought that had come to the minds of all.

"I don't believe he was connected with it," said Dave. "It's an awful thing to think a fellow is a thief." He looked at Shadow, who understood him thoroughly, as my old readers will understand. "But—he was there with Jasniff," he added, slowly.

"Do you think Jasniff had anything to do with it, Dave?"

"I should hate to think any boy was a thief."

"I don't believe a fellow like Jasniff could open that safe," came from Roger. "Those robbers must have had regular burglars' tools."

"But what made Plum so afraid, or dumbstruck,

or whatever you may call it?" asked Ben. "It was no small thing, I can tell you that."

"Perhaps he got scared, thinking he was at Rockville with Jasniff at the time of the robbery," answered Dave. "He knows Jasniff is a kind of outcast just now. Perhaps he himself suspects Jasniff."

The students speculated over the affair for some time. At first Dave thought it might be best to let Dr. Clay know, but finally concluded to keep quiet and see what the next few days would bring forth.

The bully of the school was certainly ill at ease that day and also the next. He missed nearly all his lessons and was sharply reprimanded by Job Haskers.

"I've got a headache," he said. "It has ached for several days. I wish you would excuse me." And this getting to the ears of the doctor, he was told to take some headache tablets and retire.

Some of the students who were of a mechanical mind had built themselves ice-boats and these were now being used on the river whenever the opportunity afforded. Messmer and Henshaw had a boat, and one afternoon after school they asked Roger and Dave to go for a sail down the river. Ice-boating was something of a novelty to Dave, and he accepted the invitation gladly and so did the senator's son.

The ice-boat built by Messmer and Henshaw

was about twenty feet long, with a single sail, and was named the *Snowbird*. It was by no means a handsome craft, not being painted, but under favorable conditions developed good speed, and that was all the builders wanted.

"We didn't build her for beauty, we built her for service," Henshaw explained.

"Well, as long as she'll go that's all we want," answered Roger. "I shouldn't give a cent for a boat that was good-looking and couldn't get over the ground."

"Did you ever see a boat get over the ground, Roger?" asked Dave, quizzically.

"Well—er—not exactly, but you know what I mean, Dave."

"So I do, and I agree with you."

The start of the trip was made in fine shape, and for a little while they sailed along in company with two other ice-boats belonging to other students. But then the others turned back, and the *Snowbird* continued on the course alone.

"This is certainly grand!" cried Dave, enthusiastically. He was sitting at the bow, holding fast with one hand and holding on his cap with the other. "My! but we are rushing along."

"It's just the right kind of a breeze," said Henshaw.

"Beats skating, doesn't it?" came from Roger. "We must be making about a mile a minute!"

"We won't dare to go too far," said Messmer. "Remember, we've got to get back, and that will take longer."

"Maybe the wind will change."

"No such luck, I am afraid."

On they went, the runners of the *Snowbird* making a sharp skir-r-r on the smooth ice. They were passing an island and as they reached the end they came in sight of another ice-boat, carrying a number of boys in military uniform.

"Hello! there is an ice-boat from Rockville Military Academy!" exclaimed Dave. "That's a pretty good-looking craft." This was a deserved compliment, for the ice-boat was gayly painted and decorated with a small flag.

"Hello!" yelled one of the Rockville students, as the other craft came closer. "Where did you borrow that old tub?"

"From the fellow who swapped it for that barn-door you're riding on," retorted Dave, quickly.

"I'll give you ten cents for it," went on another Rockville cadet.

"Thanks, but we don't want to rob you," answered Roger, merrily.

"Maybe you think you can beat us," said Henshaw, who had been eying the other ice-boat critically.

"We don't think so—we know it," was the quick rejoinder.

The *Snowbird* continued to forge ahead. — *Page 265.*

"Come ahead then, and prove it," exclaimed Messmer.

In a moment more the race was on. There was a straight course of two miles ahead and over this the rival ice-boats flew, at first side by side. Then an extra puff of wind took the Rockville craft ahead.

"What did I tell you!" cried one of the cadets. "You're too slow for us. Good-by!"

"You're not leaving us yet," answered Henshaw, who was steering, and he threw the *Snowbird* over a bit from the shore. The wind was coming over the top of a hill and now both craft got the full benefit of it. On they rushed, with Rockville slightly ahead. Then, slowly but surely, the Oak Hall boat began to crawl up.

"We are gaining!" cried Dave.

"Oh, if I only had a bellows, to help make wind!" sighed the senator's son.

They had still half a mile to go when of a sudden the *Snowbird* shot ahead. Those on the Rockville craft were amazed and their faces fell.

"Here is where we beat you!" cried Henshaw. "Good-by! We'll tell 'em you are coming."

"Oh, go to grass!" growled one of the Rockville cadets, and then the *Snowbird* continued to forge ahead, leaving the rival ice-boat far behind.

"They feel sick," said Dave. "I must say I

didn't think this ice-boat could do it. You've certainly got something worth having."

"Even if we are not all painted up and haven't a flag," added Messmer.

They continued on the course for quarter of a mile further. Then they came to a number of islands, and rounding one of these started to tack back. Meanwhile the rival ice-boat passed on down the river.

"Not so much fun in this," observed Roger. "I like to rush right before the wind."

"That's like the small boy who wanted to go down hill on his sled all the time and never wanted to walk back," answered Henshaw. "But going back will not be so much of a hardship as you think."

"Oh, I'll like it well enough," answered the senator's son, quickly.

They were soon opposite one of the islands not over a mile from Oak Hall. It was a lonely and rocky spot and one seldom visited by any of the students.

"Somebody is out skating here," said Dave, and he pointed out two persons who were close to the island.

A moment later the ice-boat was thrown over on the other reach and came close to the island. Then Roger uttered an exclamation:

"The tall man and the short man!"

"Can they be the robbers?" queried Dave, quickly.

He watched the pair, and saw them disappear behind some bare bushes which fringed the shore of the island.

"Roger, I think we ought to try to find out something about those fellows."

"I think so myself."

"If those are the rascals who robbed the Rockville railroad station, we ought to try to capture them," said Henshaw.

"How can we do that?" asked Messmer. "We are not armed."

"Let us follow them up anyway," said Dave.

This was agreed to by all on board the *Snowbird*, and in a few minutes the craft was run close to the shore and the sail was lowered.

"I am going to arm myself," said Roger, and suited the action to the word by picking up a heavy stick that lay handy. Seeing this, the others also procured sticks, and thus armed, all made their way to the spot where the two men had last been seen.

"Here are their tracks in the snow," said Dave, pointing to the drift which the wind had swept up from the river. "It will be easy enough to follow their tracks."

"We had better go slow and make no noise,"

cautioned Roger. "If they hear us they'll be on guard and may run away."

Slowly and silently after that the students followed the trail, through the snow and over the wind-swept rocks. They passed under some tall trees, crossed a frozen-over gully, and then came to where a pile of rocks appeared to bar their further progress.

"They passed along this way!" whispered Dave, pointing to the footmarks, close to the base of the rocks. "Go slow now, or——"

"Hush!" interrupted Roger. "I hear voices."

"I see a cabin, just beyond the turn of these rocks," said Henshaw. "The two men must be there."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CABIN ON THE ISLAND

THE four boys came to a halt, to consider what they should do next. They did not know but that the two men might be desperate characters and ready to fight hard if cornered. They might even be ready to do some shooting.

"I'll go ahead and take a look around," said Dave. "You others had better remain here for the present."

This was agreed to, and with extreme caution Dave made his way around a corner of the rocks and along some bushes, to one side of the cabin. The building was of logs, very much dilapidated, having been erected by some campers many years before.

As Dave came close to one of the windows of the cabin he saw a man cross the floor in the direction of a rude fireplace. Then a match was struck, and some paper lit. Soon a fire was blazing in the room, casting a ruddy glare over all.

Both men were present, each still wrapped in his overcoat and with his hat pulled down over his

forehead. That they were the individuals he had seen in Rockville the night of the concert and the robbery the youth was quite sure.

Dave was anxious to hear what the two fellows might have to say, and so crept closer to the window, which was wide open. Near the window a log was loose, leaving quite a crack, and by putting his ear to this the boy made out nearly all that was being said.

"We were simple, I think, to come here, Pud," said the tall man, as he threw some more wood on the fire. "We ought to be miles away by this time."

"I ain't going away yet, Hunk," was the reply from the short man. "You know what I came for. Well, I am going to stick it out."

"But it is getting more dangerous every day," pleaded the man called Hunk.

"Oh, you only think so."

"No, I don't. Didn't I read the papers,—and didn't you read them too? They are after us, I tell you."

"Well, they haven't got us yet."

After that there was a pause, during which one of the men put some water in a pot to boil and brought out some provisions in a flour bag.

"Who is next on that list of yours?" asked the man called Hunk, presently.

"Paul Barbridge, and I want to do him up good.

He was the foreman of the jury that sent me up for two years."

"Has he got money?"

"I think so—leastwise, I am going to find out," and the speaker gave a low chuckle. "Oh, I ain't going to let up until I run through the whole twelve or their families. And then I am going to strike the judge—and strike him good and hard. I'll show 'em that they can't send Pud Frodel to prison and not get paid back! I said I'd get square when I was sentenced and I am going to keep my word. Fairchild died on me, but I reckon I fixed his widow for it."

There was another pause, during which both men prepared to eat some of the provisions they had brought with them. Dave was on the point of rejoining his companions, when the men began to speak again and now their words filled him with amazement.

"You're a queer one, Pud," said the man called Hunk. "A queer one, I must say. Sometimes I wonder to myself how I can stick to you."

"Well, you haven't got to stick if you don't want to."

"I know that. But you want me, don't you?"

"I like to have somebody, and—you like your share, eh?" And the short man laughed harshly. "I've been square, haven't I?"

"Yes, to the cent—and that is why I stick to you.

But you do such queer things. Now, for instance, those schoolboys——"

"Oh, don't bring that up again, Hunk. I know just what I am doing. I told you that before."

"Well, one of those boys may be all right, but I shouldn't trust the other."

"Both of 'em want money—want it just as bad, almost, as we do. One of 'em up and told me so."

"Yes, but——"

"When fellows like that want money—actually want it—they get desperate. At such a high-toned school they have to keep up a front, and they can't do that unless they have got the coin in their pockets."

"When are you going to see them again?"

"To-morrow."

"Where?"

"At the old mill, near Nabill's."

"Well, if you—— What's that?"

The speaker broke off short, as a sound from outside reached his ears. Tired of waiting for Dave, Roger and the other students had come closer and Henshaw had stumbled over a loose stone and gone crashing into a hollow among some bushes.

"Somebody out there!" ejaculated Pud Frodel, and caught up a club that stood handy.

"Maybe they're following us!" returned his

companion. "Come on and see. We don't want to be cornered in a place like this."

"Oh, my ankle!" came in a painful cry from Henshaw. He had given that member a severe wrench.

"Some of the schoolboys!" cried one of the men.

"Let us get out," added the other.

"Are those two fellows we know in the crowd?"

"No, these are all strangers."

After having run out of the cabin, the two men went in again. Then they seemed to suddenly disappear.

"Hullo, Dave!" sang out Roger. He could see but little in the gloom of the coming night, for it was now nearly supper time.

"I am here, Roger."

"Where are the men? And what kept you so long?"

"I don't know where the men are," answered Dave, ignoring the other question. "They just stepped back into the cabin."

"Look out that somebody isn't shot," said Messmer, nervously.

"Are they the fellows we are after?" asked the senator's son.

"I am pretty sure they are," whispered Dave. "But I want to talk to you about it later," he added, giving Roger's arm a knowing squeeze. "There is something of great importance in the air."

"I should think there would be—if these are the thieves, Dave."

"It's more than that. But don't ask me about it just now."

After some hesitation, the four boys entered the cabin. The fire was burning brightly, so that they could see with ease. All looked in consternation. Not a sign of the two men was to be seen anywhere.

"Where are they?"

"They certainly came in here!"

"That is true—they did come in here," said Dave. "Perhaps they are in hiding."

The boys began to search around the cabin and presently the senator's son found a piece of a log that was loose. He gave a push and it rolled away, showing a dark hole, leading through some thick bushes and past some rocks.

"This is the way they went!" he shouted. "It's a clever outlet."

The passageway was so dark the boys hesitated for a moment about entering it. Then Dave caught up a firebrand and went in. Soon the others heard him shout from some distance behind the cabin.

"Come right through!" he called. "It's all right."

They went through and next found themselves under some tall trees. Beyond was an open space,

and here the tracks of the two men were plainly to be distinguished. They led to the shore of the island and disappeared on the ice beyond.

"They've gotten away from us," said Henshaw, disappointedly. He was limping badly.

"How's the ankle?" asked Dave.

"I gave it a bad twist, but I guess I can walk to the ice-boat."

Nothing could be seen in the fast-gathering darkness, and after remaining at the shore for a few minutes, the four retraced their steps to the dilapidated cabin. Here the fire was replenished and the students looked around for evidence against the two men.

"They are certainly the two men who committed the robberies in this district," said Dave. "They as much as admitted it themselves. The short, stout fellow is the leader and he is doing the work for a particular reason. He was once sent to prison for two years. He vowed he would get square on the twelve jurymen and the judge who convicted him. So now he is going around robbing one after another of the thirteen."

"Mrs. Fairchild wasn't a juryman," said Messmer.

"No, but her husband was—the fellow mentioned that."

"It's a pity we didn't catch them," said Roger. "We got tired of waiting for you and were afraid

you had gotten into some kind of trouble," he added, to Dave.

They looked around the cabin with care, but could find little outside of the provisions previously mentioned. There were some evidences that the men had been there a number of times, but that was all.

"This is not their regular hanging-out place," said Dave. "They must have another resort—where they have at least some of their plunder."

"I think the best thing we can do is to get back to the Hall and notify Dr. Clay," said Roger. "He can then set the authorities on their track."

This was considered good advice, and putting out the fire, so that it might not destroy the cabin, they left the place once more and started for the spot where they had left the *Snowbird*.

To Henshaw the walk was a difficult one, and the others had to help him over the trying places. Consequently, when they at last reached the shore it was pitch dark. A cold north wind caused all to shiver.

"It will be no easy job steering back to the Hall in this darkness," said Messmer. "A fellow can't see fifty feet ahead of him."

"Oh, I know the course well enough," answered Henshaw.

The ice-boat was found exactly as they had left it, and soon the craft was shoved out on the lake.

Then all got aboard, the sail was hoisted, and off they started for Oak Hall.

"Phew! but it is getting cold!" was Dave's remark, as he buttoned up his overcoat.

"Those men will have a cold walk, wherever they may be going," returned Messmer.

"They said something about the old mill," answered Dave. "I'll tell you the story after I've seen Dr. Clay."

On and on sped the *Snowbird* with the wind shifting in her favor. It was so cold the tears streamed down the cheeks of all the boys and Roger declared that his ears were about frozen. They tried to look ahead, but could see next to nothing.

"Henshaw, are you sure of your course?" asked Dave, presently.

"I think I am," was the hesitating response. "But it is dark, no two ways about it."

The wind now took another turn and the iceboat bore away to the left bank of the river. Henshaw did what he could to bring the craft about, but two minutes later came a grating jar and everybody was pitched off into a snowbank, some heels over head.

"I guess we've landed!" spluttered Roger, as he pulled himself to his feet. "Henshaw, what did you do that for?"

"I—I didn't know we were going ashore," re-

plied Henshaw, who had gone head first into the snow himself. "Anybody hurt?"

One after another got up. Fortunately nobody had been hurt. Messmer had some of the snow down his back and Dave had some up his coat sleeve. The ice-boat was as good as ever.

"Now we want to be more careful," said Dave, as they hauled the craft on the lake once more. "One such spill is enough."

"That's true," said Roger. Then the journey was resumed, nobody dreaming of the accident so close at hand.

CHAPTER XXX

DAVE'S HEROISM

As the ice-boat swept along Dave revolved in his mind all that he had heard at the old cabin.

He could place but one meaning on the words spoken by the two criminals regarding two schoolboys. They must refer to Nick Jasniff and Gus Plum.

"Can it be that those two are in with such rascals?" he asked himself. "I might think it of Jasniff, but I never dreamed Plum could be quite so bad. And yet last season he did some pretty crooked work with the valuable postage stamps that disappeared."

On and on swept the *Snowbird*, through the darkness of the night. It was growing colder each moment, and the cutting wind made each of the lads shiver. Dave wanted to tell Roger his tale in full, but now was no time for connected conversation.

Suddenly out of the darkness loomed a strange object, moving in almost the same direction as the *Snowbird*. It was the ice-boat belonging to the Rockville cadets.

"Look out!" yelled Henshaw, while Messmer gave a scream of fright. Then both ice-boats appeared to turn toward each other, there came a grinding, rending crash, and in a twinkling Dave found himself spinning on his back over the ice with Roger beside him.

Fortunately for Dave he landed in such a fashion that he received little more harm than a thorough shaking up. He slid a distance of two hundred feet and then came to a stop in a small ridge of snow.

"Hello, I wonder if anybody is hurt?" he asked himself, and got to his feet as quickly as possible. He walked back to the scene of the collision and soon ran into the senator's son.

"Are you all right, Dave?"

"Yes, Roger; how about you?"

"Got shaken up, that's all."

"Help! help!" came faintly from one of the ice-boats, and running back Dave and Roger saw Henshaw on the ice, with the overturned *Snowbird* on top of him. Close at hand lay the second ice-boat, and it was plain to see that both craft were much damaged.

Messmer was near, suffering from a cut on his hand, yet he was willing to go to Henshaw's assistance. The bow end of the *Snowbird* was raised and Henshaw dragged himself forth.

"Are you badly hurt?" asked Dave, anxiously.

"My left leg got a pretty good squeeze," answered Henshaw, trying to limp around on the member. "I am afraid I can't walk on it." And he sat down on the edge of the overturned ice-boat.

In the meanwhile the Rockville cadets were pulling themselves together. All had been bruised and scratched a little, but that was all. Their ice-boat, too, had gone over, and the runners were partly broken.

"That was your fault!" growled one of the cadets, striding over to the students of Oak Hall.

"No more our fault than yours," answered Dave.

"You ran right into us."

"You did as much of the running in as we did," answered Roger.

"Do you suppose I got my leg hurt for fun?" growled Henshaw.

"Are you hurt?" questioned another of the cadets.

"I am."

"Well, I am sorry for that."

The fact that Henshaw was hurt caused the Rockville boys to become a little more friendly, and two of them said they would do what they could for the sufferer. No more was said about the cause of the accident, which was in reality the fault of both parties equally.

Nothing much could be done for Henshaw. It pained him to stand on the injured leg and so he remained sitting down. The other boys began to inspect both ice-boats. It was found that they were badly broken at the bow and both masts were loosened. As a consequence, while they could be used, progress on the river, even before the wind, would be slow.

"This is too bad," observed Dave. "We ought to get back to Oak Hall as soon as possible, and tell the doctor what we have learned."

After a good deal of tugging both ice-boats were righted and each party boarded its own craft. On they went in the darkness and soon separated, the craft from Rockville doing a little better than that containing our friends.

"I don't think we'll get back to the Hall much before midnight," said Dave, and this proved to be the case. It lacked just ten minutes of that time when they tied up at the boathouse. Henshaw's leg was now stiff and the others had to carry him to the door.

"Ha! so I have caught you!" exclaimed Job Haskers, as he suddenly showed himself. "What do you mean by coming in at this late hour?"

"We've had an accident—Henshaw is hurt," answered Roger.

At this announcement the teacher's face took on a sour look.

"An accident, eh? You are quite sure?" he demanded, with a suspicious look at Henshaw.

"Yes, I'm sure," grumbled the hurt one. "We had a collision with another ice-boat, and when our craft turned over I was caught underneath."

"What is the trouble there?" came in Dr. Clay's voice, and he showed himself at the top of the stairs and then came down. After asking a few questions he had Henshaw taken to a private bedchamber, where the injured limb was carefully examined and then bathed with liniment.

"I wish to see you in private, Dr. Clay," said Dave. "Perhaps Morr and Messmer will want to see you too."

"Very well, come into the office," answered the master of Oak Hall, and led the way. He made a light and then faced the three students who had followed him.

In a plain, straightforward manner Dave told of the visit to the rocky island and the old cabin, and of what the two men had said. He did not mention the talk about the two schoolboys, although strongly tempted to do so. He said the two men expected to go to the old mill, near Nabill's farm, the next day.

"This is very important," exclaimed the doctor, when he had finished. "I must notify the authorities at once, and we must do everything we can to capture the rascals."

"Can I do anything?" asked Roger.

"I think not. As you say one man is very tall and the other very short, it ought not to be a very difficult matter to recognize them if they show themselves. The old mill is also well known, so there can be no mistake."

"Of course, they may not go to the mill now," went on Dave.

"That is true. But I will have the authorities keep a close watch all around this district and also at the railroad stations. As he has been in prison this Pud Frodel must be known."

After that the doctor told the boys they had better go to bed, and they did so. But it was an hour before Dave could get to sleep. Once he thought of getting up and visiting Gus Plum's dormitory, but gave up the idea, knowing that all the others would want to know what was doing.

In the morning the weather changed. It was not so cold, but the snow was coming down thickly and the wind sent it swirling in all directions. Already the ground was covered to a depth of several inches, and there was no telling when the storm would cease.

"This will make it hard to track those men," observed Roger, as he and Dave came down for breakfast.

"Roger, I want to tell you something," said Dave, and as the pair walked to a secluded corner

of a hallway Dave told his chum what had been on his mind since the visit to the lonely cabin.

"Oh, Dave! can this be true?" cried the senator's son, in horror. "Can Jasniff and Plum really be mixed up in this?"

"It looks like it to me, Roger," was Dave's slow reply. "And yet I shouldn't want to say a word until I was certain. Jasniff I know is bad,—and so is Plum, for the matter of that. But there is a difference between them."

"I know it, Dave. Jasniff is wicked at heart, while Gus is more a bully and headstrong." The senator's son paused. "What do you propose to do?"

"I've been thinking of having a straight talk with Plum. Of course, if he is really in with those robbers I'll have to expose him."

The chums talked the matter over for several minutes and then went in to breakfast. Plum was there, but Dave noticed that the bully ate little. Soon Plum arose and left the dining room abruptly. Dave followed, why he could hardly tell. But he had a feeling that he must follow Plum then and there.

The bully of Oak Hall passed from the hall to the coat room, and there donned his overcoat, hat, and rubbers. Then he walked to a side door, and opening it cautiously, stepped out into the howling storm.

Dave was now certain something unusual was in the wind, for the school session would begin in twenty minutes and he knew Plum would not go out in such a storm without good reason. Quickly he donned his own coat, hat, and rubbers and followed to the outside of the school building. He saw Plum running across the campus and he followed. Then the bully leaped the boxwood hedge and came out on a road leading to a village called Bagor, a short distance from Rockville.

"Perhaps he is going to meet Jasniff," Dave reasoned. "He must be pretty well upset. I don't believe he even got permission to leave."

The road led through a wood and then up a long hill. The snow was so thick that Dave had all he could do to keep Plum in sight. The bully of the Hall walked rapidly, his head bent low and his hands rammed well down in his overcoat pockets.

The high ground at the top of the hill gained, Plum struck off to the southeast, in the direction of the railroad tracks. Inside of five minutes he reached a point where the tracks ran through a deep cut. On either side were tall trees, and the sloping banks of the cut ran down almost to the rails, now covered with snow.

At the edge of the cut Plum paused again. He looked up and down the opening, as if undecided in what direction to turn. Far away a locomotive whistle sounded and a freight train appeared in

sight, rolling forward rapidly on a slight downgrade.

As the freight train came closer Plum prepared to climb down the steep slope of the cut. All was covered with ice and snow, and he had taken but a dozen steps when he lost his footing and his hold and rolled over and over. Then he struck a projecting rock and the next instant pitched forward on his head, rolled over and over once more, and landed squarely on the tracks below!

Dave was close to the edge of the cut and saw the whole occurrence. When Plum struck on his head he uttered a deep groan, showing that he was injured. Then, as he lay on the tracks, he did not move.

"He is unconscious!" thought Dave, and a chill of horror swept over him. He looked along the cut. The freight train was sweeping forward, directly for the unconscious youth. In half a minute more it would reach Plum and run over him. He heard a fierce whistle, as the locomotive engineer gave the signal for brakes, and the engine itself was reversed. But the grade was too great and the train too heavy for a sudden stop.

Dave's heart leaped into his throat. Was Plum to be ground up under his very eyes? He had no great love for the bully, but at that moment his heart went out to him as if he were a brother.

"I must save him—if I can!" he told himself.

"He must not be killed if I can help it!" And then, throwing himself face downward, he slid over the ice and snow to the bottom of the cut. His hands and face were scratched, but he paid no heed. As he touched the bottom he leaped up. The train was less than fifty feet away, the wheels grinding sharply on the tracks. He made one wild leap forward, caught Plum by the feet and dragged him out of harm's way. Then the train rolled on, coming to a stop a few seconds later.

He made one wild leap forward. — *Page 288.*

CHAPTER XXXI

GUS PLUM'S CONFESSION

"You did this for me, you! Oh, Dave Porter, how could you do it? How could you?"

It was Plum who spoke. He sat on a fallen tree not far away from the railroad cut. His forehead was swollen and there was a cut on his cheek, but otherwise he had quite recovered from the shock received. The train, after stopping for a few minutes, had gone on, and the two youths were alone.

Plum's voice was choked with emotion. He had come to his senses to find Dave and the fireman of the train bending over him. It was the fireman who had told of Dave's brave deed.

"Pluckiest thing I ever see in my born days," the fireman had said. "He came down the slope pell-mell and hauled you off the track just as we hit the spot."

Then the fireman and the train had gone on and Dave had done what he could for the bully. Plum was trembling like a leaf and found it next to im-

possible to control himself. Twice before he had tried to speak but his voice had failed him.

"You are sure you are not hurt?" asked Dave. He himself hardly knew what to say. The excitement of the occasion had put him in a dripping perspiration.

"Oh, I don't care if I am!" replied Plum. "I—I wish—I wish I was dead!"

"Plum!"

"Yes, I do! I—I—but I can't talk about it. And to think you did this for me, you! Why, I thought you hated me!"

"Perhaps I did, Gus. But I didn't hate you when I saw you on the tracks unconscious."

"You did more for me than I should ever have done for you."

"Maybe not."

"I know it, Porter, for—well, you know how I have hated you. But I am not going to be that way any more—I couldn't!"

After this there was a silence. Each boy wanted to say something, but hardly knew how to get at it. Finally Dave broke the ice.

"Gus, what brought you to this spot this morning?" he questioned.

"Oh, don't ask me! I was crazy, I guess. I wanted to get away—I never wanted to see Oak Hall or anybody again!"

"Were you going to run away?"

"I guess so—I don't know. I didn't sleep last night nor the night before."

"Gus, tell me the truth, will you?" went on Dave, boldly. "Are you working with those fellows who robbed the Rockville railroad station and those other places?"

"No! no! Oh, Porter! Dave! What do you know about this—about me?" Plum's face grew as white as the snow around them. "I—I heard what you told Dr. Clay last night—I was listening at the door. Do you—do you know anything more?"

"I do and I don't, Gus. Those men said something about two schoolboys, and I and some others saw you in Rockville the night of the robbery. More than that, I know what sort of a fellow Nick Jasniff is, and you and he are always together."

"Dave, I didn't steal any money, I give you my word I didn't! I was led along by Jasniff. I was in debt and I needed money badly. Jasniff said he knew where he could borrow some for me, and he did get me fifty dollars. Then he introduced me to that short man, who went by the name of Sloan, and to the tall man, who went by the name of Carson. It seems Jasniff knew Sloan, or Pud Frodel, years ago, before he was sent to prison. The tall man isn't over-bright and he is simply Pud Frodel's tool. One day I was talking to the tall man and I soon found out what sort of a crowd they were,

although the tall fellow didn't say so in so many words. Then I wanted to cut them, and cut Nick Jasniff too, but Jasniff said if I did, he'd write a letter to Dr. Clay exposing me. Jasniff, after he ran away from the Hall, went right in with the robbers and he wanted me to go in, but I up and told him I wouldn't have anything more to do with him and with those rascals."

"Good for you, Gus!" cried Dave, heartily. "I am glad to hear that."

"Wait, I am not done yet. Jasniff tried to smooth matters over and asked me to meet him at Rockville. I did so, as you know, and I met the men too. We had a meal together and I was drugged. After that I don't know what I did. When I was myself again Jasniff said I had helped to rob the railroad station."

"But did you?"

"I don't think so, although I remember being taken to somewhere in a carriage and seeing the lights of the station. After that, I had some hot words with Jasniff and came back to the Hall. Then Jasniff sent a letter, stating he would surely expose me if I opened my mouth to anybody. Then came your news to the doctor. If those men are captured, and Jasniff with them, they will surely drag me into the affair! How am I going to face it—especially after what happened last summer? Oh, I wish I was dead!"

Gus Plum's lips began to tremble and the tears stood in his eyes. His better nature was struggling to the surface, and he was a most miserable object to behold. Dave pitied the lad from the bottom of his heart.

"It certainly does look black, Gus," he said. "But if you are not guilty I'd face the music if I were you. If those men are brought into court you can turn witness against them, and against Jasniff too. I know it will hurt you in school—but if you don't want to stay here you can go to some other academy."

After this Dave talked to Gus Plum for a full half-hour, giving the other boy his best advice. Both lads were so excited that neither minded the snow and the cold. Plum was in a deeply penitent mood and during the course of the conversation told how he and Jasniff and Poole had cut down the tree and let it fall on the roadway, so that Dave and Babcock had been pitched off their wheels, and he also told of how Henshaw had been drugged previous to the football game, and of several other mean things that had been accomplished.

"And then to think that on top of it all you saved my life," Plum went on. "Oh, Dave, I can't understand it! You're the best boy alive!"

"Oh, no, I am not," answered Dave. "I've got lots of faults of my own, Gus, lots of them!"

"But you're not mean like me—and not dishonest. I don't wonder the fellows like you."

At last they started back for the school, the snow pelting them in the face as they journeyed along. Each boy was busy with his thoughts and but little was said. When they came in sight of the Hall Gus Plum halted.

"Oh, I can't do it! I can't!" he almost sobbed.

"Come, I'll go with you to Dr. Clay," answered Dave, and linked his arm in that of the other youth. Thus they entered a side door and passed directly to the office. Here, when confronted by the master of Oak Hall, Gus Plum burst into bitter tears and it was several minutes before he could utter a word.

When the confession had been finally made Gus Plum's face wore a more peaceful look than it had for many a day. He kept nothing back, nor did he try to defend himself in the least. He wanted Dave to remain in the office and addressed his words quite as much to his fellow student as to the master of the Hall.

"I know I am not fit to remain here, Dr. Clay," he said at last. "And if you send me home I shall not complain. But please don't hand me over to the police! Anything but that!"

It was then that Dr. Clay spoke, and never had Dave seen him more stern and at the same time dignified. In well-chosen words he told Plum

what he thought of his pupil's meanness and baseness.

"By your own confession, you acknowledge doing things of which I did not dream a pupil of mine could be guilty. You have endangered the very lives of Porter and Babcock, as well as the life of little Frank Bond. More than this, you have been guilty of drinking and gambling, and you have been the companion of common criminals. And this on top of what happened last year! Plum, I do not see how I can forgive you. You have been a discredit to this school, and if I hand you over to the police it will serve you right."

"Dr. Clay!" It was Dave who spoke. He was filled with emotion that he could not suppress. "Please don't do that! For my part, I am willing to forgive Gus for what he did to me. Please give him another chance, just one! If you hand him over to the police you'll blast his reputation forever!"

The doctor turned to the speaker in surprise, and as Dave went on, pleading the cause of his former enemy, the master's face gradually relaxed. He sat back in his chair, folded his arms, and cast a searching gaze on Gus Plum's pale, haggard features.

"Plum, listen to me," he said, and now there was a trace of kindness in his tones. "If I give you one more chance——"

"Oh, Dr. Clay, if you'll do that!" sobbed the boy, "I'll—I'll try to be better! I'll try to give up my bad habits! I never realized until now how really bad I have been! Just give me the chance, and I'll be better! I'll do as Chip Macklin is doing. Chip was never as bad as I've been, but you know how he has changed. I want to do better—I want to make something of myself, as Porter is doing. Please give me one more chance!"

"I'll do it!" said the doctor, softly, almost fatherly.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MEDAL OF HONOR—CONCLUSION

THROUGHOUT Oak Hall there was an air of mystery that day. Gus Plum did not show himself and Dave did not come to his class until after dinner. When Dave did appear many wanted to question him, but he evaded the crowd and took no one but Roger into his confidence, although later he told Babcock and Henshaw how Plum had confessed to what had been done previous to the football game.

"That was dastardly," said Babcock.

"I know it," said Dave. "But believe me, Plum is suffering for it. He has a great deal on his mind, and it will be a real act of charity on your part if you forgive him. He has promised Dr. Clay that he will reform, and I think we ought to help him to do it."

"He can't reform—it isn't in him," said Henshaw, promptly.

"I can't believe you," answered Dave. "If you had seen what I saw you'd think better of Gus. He has a good side to him as well as a bad side. I

am going to give him a chance and I hope all the other fellows will too."

"But what is it all about?" insisted Buster Beggs. "Jasniff?"

"Yes, Jasniff is mixed up in it, and he did his best to get Plum into a lot of trouble. Perhaps you'll hear all about it some day. I have promised to keep quiet, so I can't say anything,—and I don't want to speak about it anyway," added Dave, with feeling.

The snowstorm lasted for three days, and during that time no word came in from the authorities who were trying to catch Pud Frodel and his companion in crime. The doctor had notified the representatives of the law of the proposed meeting at the old mill, and some officers had gone there, only to find that the evildoers had changed their plans.

It was hard for Dave to settle down to his lessons, yet he did his best, for the examinations were now close at hand and he still had his eye fixed on the medal of honor. Plum came back to his class and was a changed person. Whenever he recited he did so in a low voice, and the minute he was dismissed he disappeared, where, none of the pupils seemed to know. He was occupying a small room by himself and kept the door locked.

At last the storm cleared away and then came in word that one of the men, the fellow called Hunk,

had been caught. He was closely questioned, and being rather simple-minded, as previously mentioned, said that Pud Frodel had gone to New York, in company with Nick Jasniff. He said that Jasniff was now hand-in-glove with Frodel, and that the two were planning more mischief.

Upon this news Dr. Clay sent a cablegram to Mr. Jasniff, who was in London, that Nick had run away from school and also sent a letter of particulars. Later word came back that Mr. Jasniff would have a relative look for Nick and would be back himself as soon as he could arrange certain business matters.

At last came the day for the school examinations. Dave was fully prepared for them, and when he came out three points ahead of everybody else nobody was surprised. Polly Vane stood second, Roger fourth, Ben sixth, and Shadow eighth. Gus Plum stood tenth, much to the surprise of many who had imagined he would come out close to the end.

"Dave Porter wins the medal of honor!" said a dozen.

"Hurrah for Dave!" cried Roger, and the cheers were given with a will.

The medal was presented to Dave by the doctor. The entire school was assembled for the occasion, and Dr. Clay made a neat address, in which he complimented the winner on the creditable showing he had made.

"I am highly pleased to give Master David Porter this medal," said the master of the Hall. "He deserves it in more ways than one. Why, some one else will tell."

And then, to the amazement of all, Gus Plum got up from his seat, walked quietly but firmly to the platform and faced his fellow students, his face red but determined.

"I want to say a few words about Dave Porter," he said, looking around from one face to another. "You all know me and you know how I have acted towards Dave. Well, Dave saved my life, and more than that, he has proved himself my best friend. He stood by me at a time when I guess every other fellow in the world would have turned his back on me. That's why he deserves a medal of honor,—and would deserve it even if he was at the bottom of the class." Plum paused a moment. "I ought not to speak about myself—I guess the doctor didn't think I would. But I want to say before you all that I am going to try to be different from what I used to be. The doctor might have sent me away from this school for what I did, but Dave Porter spoke up for me, and now I am to have another chance here—and I am going to make the best of it. That's all."

Gus Plum bowed and walked back to his seat. There were murmurs all around, and a few hisses, but the majority of the students looked at Plum en-

couragingly. He kept his eyes down, looking at nobody. Roger reached over and shook hands, and then a number of others did the same.

"What Plum has said about Porter is strictly true," said the doctor, coming forward again. "Therefore I take the greatest of pleasure in presenting the medal of honor to the winner, and with it I wish him the best of luck throughout life!"

A cheer went up, in which Gus Plum joined heartily. Then other prizes were presented, after which school was dismissed for the day.

Plum's speech had a tremendous effect. All wanted to know how Dave had saved his life and the story had to be told over and over again. Little was said about why the former bully had left school that snowy morning, and the boys knew enough not to ask too many questions.

"I really think he'll turn over a new leaf," said Ben. "He seems to have awakened to a realization of how he was drifting."

"I hope with all my heart he does try to do better," said Roger. "I am going to do as Dave is doing—encourage him all I can." And then Ben and a number of others said the same.

That day came a welcome letter from Phil Lawrence. He was getting better rapidly now and expected to come back to Oak Hall in a few weeks.

"This is glorious news!" cried Dave. "Poor Phil! How he has suffered!"

"And all for the glory of a football game," answered Roger. "Pretty rough sport, no mistake about it."

"Well, that's what makes it exciting," said Buster Beggs.

"Which puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow. "A boy went to the country for his health. After he had been there a week he wrote to his mother: 'Having dead loads of fun. Fell from the cherry tree and sprained my wrist, had the bull horn me over a fence, got sick eating green apples, and yesterday, when I fell in the well, I lost the dollar pop gave me. Send another dollar and it will be all right.' " And the usual short laugh went up.

On Monday came in news that Pud Frodel had been captured. It was also learned that Nick Jasniff had sneaked on board of a steamer and sailed for Europe. The next day Gus Plum received a letter which he showed to the doctor and to Dave. It ran in part as follows:

"You were a fool to go back on me. If you had stuck to me we could have made a lot of money. They are after both of the men, so I am going to clear out. I've got several hundred dollars and I expect to have a good time in Europe on it."

This communication was unsigned but was in Nick Jasniff's handwriting. Gus Plum shivered as he perused it.

"I am glad I did not stick by him," said he. "I am sorry I ever had anything to do with him."

"His influence in this school was certainly very bad," said Dr. Clay.

Later on the two men were tried and convicted, and each received several years in prison as a punishment for their crimes. Only a small amount of the stolen goods was recovered, which made Mrs. Fairchild, Mr. Lapham, and a number of others mourn. Much to the surprise of everybody it came out that Frodel and the other man had robbed Roger while he lay unconscious at the bridge and had also made off with his motor cycle. They had wanted to pawn this, but had not dared, and it was found where they had placed it, under some hay in a barn near Oakdale. During the trials Gus Plum was called as a witness for the state to testify and did so, doing nothing to shield himself. This was considered to his credit, and when he returned to Oak Hall many thought more of him than ever. There was now a coolness between the former bully and Nat Poole, who seemed to be left in the cold all around.

"I don't think we'll ever see anything more of Jasniff," said Dave one day to Roger. But in this surmise Dave was mistaken, and how will be re-

lated in another volume of this series, to be entitled, "Dave Porter in the Far North; or, The Pluck of an American Schoolboy." In this volume we shall meet many of our friends again, and learn what Dave did towards finding his father and his sister who had so mysteriously disappeared during their tour of Europe.

Thanksgiving was now at hand, and many of the boys prepared to return to their homes for the holidays. Dave was going to Crumville and so was Ben. Roger was going home too, along with Shadow and Buster Beggs and Sam Day.

"I am going to stop to see Phil," said Dave, and Ben went with him. Phil was delighted over the visit, and amazed to learn the news concerning Plum and Jasniff.

"Dave, you're a dandy!" he cried. "You're one boy in a thousand!"

"Say one boy in ten thousand!" answered Ben.

At this Dave smiled quietly.

"I only tried to do my duty," said he.

The homecoming was full of pleasure to the boy, and here, for the time being, we will leave Dave. He had won the medal of honor, and no one begrudged him the pleasure it gave him to wear it.

THE END

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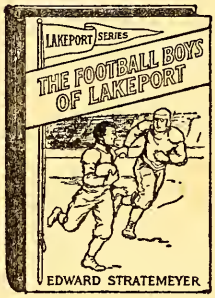

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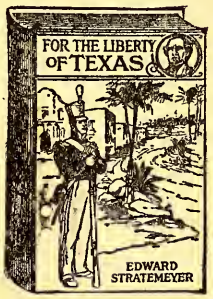

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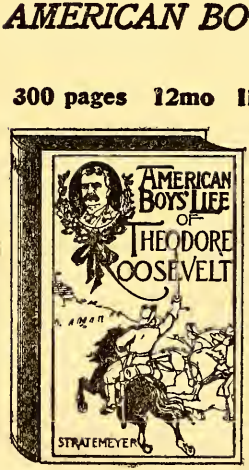

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